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Upgrade your PC — How-To Guide p. 56

GAME PLAYERS

PC Entertainment™

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Leisure Suit LARRY! 6

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Survival of the Fittest: 4 CD-ROM GAMES Head to Head

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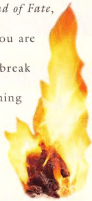
Now you see it. Now you don't. The land of Kyrandia is disappearing piece by piece and all the evidence points toward one perilous conclusion: a curse. Thus begins *The Hand of Fate*, second in the *Fables & Fiends*™ series, where you are the offbeat, young mystic who must voyage to the center of the world to break the spell. Out of sync and out on foot, your aberrant journey reveals nothing is what it seems. Everything is what it isn't. And you can count your friends on one hand. Literally. Conspiring to push the twisted edge of cinemagraphic entertainment, Westwood Studios has designed more puzzles and gameplay in the first few chapters of *The Hand of Fate* than in all of *The Legend of Kyrandia*™. The most advanced graphics on the market are first pencil tested, then painted on-screen to surrealistic perfection. Breakthrough *Trulight* technology illuminates each scene more cinematically for a fuller, fourth dimensional picture. The new *State of Mind System*, along with superior intuitive interfacing, enables you and over 50 characters to change your mind, mood and mayhem based on preceding events. Don't just play with your mind. Change the way your mind plays. Grasp *The Hand of Fate* and kiss conventional logic goodbye.



Shadow

Sunlight

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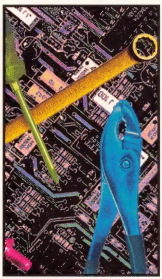
CONTENTS

Larry 6: Has America's favorite lounge lizard gone too far?
p. 28

Survival of the Fittest: A head-to-head comparison of 4 CD-ROM adventures — and more!
p. 34

Privateer: Chris Roberts' best game yet?
p. 60



Upgrade your PC — we show you how!
p.56

DEPARTMENTS

4
FIRST ANNUAL READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

8
PC GAMING NEWS
The latest news and trends from the gaming industry.

COLUMNS

12
ALTERNATE LIVES
After two long years, *Daemonsgate* is finally here. Neil Randall has the inside story — and a bit on the seven deadly sins of role-playing games.

16
EXTENDED PLAY
The Empire may be in for some trouble as Lucasarts' *B-Wing* adds a hot new fighter to the Rebel arsenal. Plus add-ons for *Strike Commander*, *Empire Deluxe*, and *Links 386 Pro*, as well as the latest bug patches.

20
THE DESKTOP GENERAL
This month, *Gary Grigsby's Pacific War* faces off against *WWII: Battles Of The South Pacific*. William Trotter gives you the full report.

24
THE LEARNING GAME
Educational columnist Heidi Aycock takes a look at Davidson's ambitious new release, *Kid CAD*.

FEATURES

28
LEISURE SUIT LARRY 6: SHAPE UP OR SLIP OUT
Larry is back, in this long-awaited sequel from Sierra's Al Lowe. We've got the scoop — plus a Larry retrospective, and a look at a title even Larry wouldn't like.

34
SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST
We've matched up the latest games in a head-to-head comparison to let you know which one has the features you want. May the best game win!

52
THE HUMAN TOUCH: ONLINE GAMING
If you're tired of gaming alone, or against predictable computer opponents, take a look at our guide to on-line gaming.

56
REPLACE THAT MOTHERBOARD!
Need more power for all those hot new titles? Upgrading is easier than you might think, thanks to this do-it-yourself guide.

REVIEWS

ALLIE'S PLAYHOUSE	95
THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES	95
THE BLUE AND THE GRAY	66
BODY BLOWS	90
COASTER	84
DARK SUN	64
DINOPARK TYCOON	92
DUNGEON HACK	81
THE EVEN MORE INCREDIBLE MACHINE	86
THE GEEKWAD — GAMES OF THE GALAXY	92
GLOBAL DOMINATION	83
THE GREAT WAR	88
THE HAND OF FATE	78
HEIRS TO THE THRONE	87
HOMEY D. CLOWN	93
KID ZOO	93
MASTER OF ORION	70
MY OWN STORIES	89
POSITRONIC BRIDGE	96
PRIVATEER	60
QUARTERPOLE	72
RETURN TO ZORK	74
ROSEMARY WEST'S HOUSE OF FORTUNE	94
SHADOWCASTER	76
SPEED RACER	82
STRIKE SQUAD	91
THE TORTISE AND THE HARE	94
VIDEO CUBE	96

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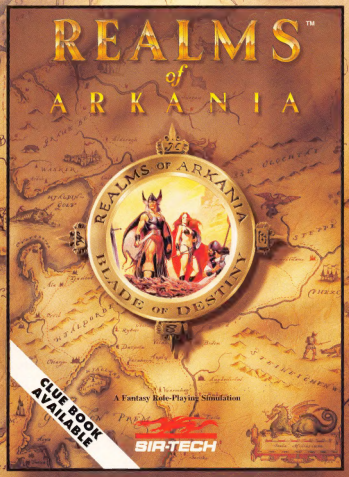

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FIRST ANNUAL READER'S CHOICE AWARDS

As this issue goes to press, our editors are casting their ballots for the best games of 1993. The winners will be announced at Winter CES, and we'll have a complete listing of them in our next issue. These are the games that we feel offer the most game play for your dollar, or that introduced new technologies and approaches that changed the way we think about PC gaming.

But this is a two-way street, and we feel that your opinions are just as important as ours. In a way, of course, you're already using your purse strings to vote for the games you think are best. But as anyone who's worked in retail can tell you, simply looking at the best-seller list for a given software chain doesn't tell the whole story. Many software retailers have open return policies, and a game that charted well one month because of great advertising or pre-release publicity may be filling up the return bins the next month.

So here's your chance to tell *us* what *you* think were the best PC games released last year. Here are the categories in which you can cast your vote:

- **GAME OF THE YEAR**
- **Best CD-ROM Game (no infotainment, folks, we mean *games*)**
- **Best Arcade Action**
- **Best Strategy**
- **Best Role-Playing**
- **Best Simulation**
- **Best Graphic Adventure**
- **Best Sports**
- **Best War Game**
- **Best Puzzle**
- **Best Educational**

These are fairly arbitrary categories, so some games will easily fit into more than one. *IndyCar Racing* and *World Circuit*, for example, could be nominees in both Sports and Simulation, while *X-Wing* could fit into Simulation or Arcade Action. **Send your ballots to:**

***PC Entertainment* Reader's Choice Awards,**
300-A S. Westgate Drive,
Greensboro, NC, 27407.

And when you cast your votes, why not send along comments on what you'd like to see in future issues? We're here to help *you* stay on top of the latest in PC gaming, and to do that we need to hear your comments on the industry in general and *PC Entertainment* in particular.

Stephen Poole
Editor

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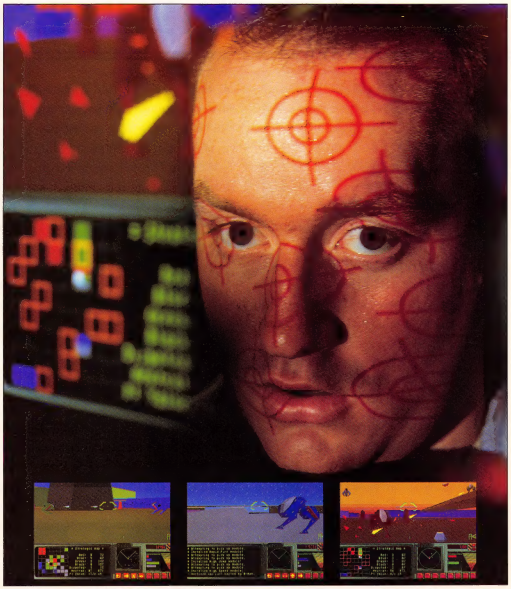

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Kuwait, May 23, 1991. Captain Dean "D-Dawg" Pennington dives to take out an Iraqi 85mm gun emplacement below. "Flares, break left!" his wingman screams. He wrenches the stick just as a SAM explodes 10 feet behind his F-16. Anti-aircraft batteries now open up all around, engulfing him. Too low to avoid the anti-aircraft, too slow to evade another SAM, he's faced with a hopeless choice and less than a quarter of a second to make it. Lighting afterburners, he rockets to safety before they can lock on again.

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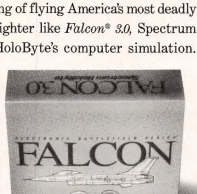
Captain Pennington survived on skill, nerve and the awesome capabilities of the F-16 Fighting Falcon. Nothing, aside from a true F-16, captures the "hair-on-fire" feeling of flying America's most deadly fighter like *Falcon® 3.0*, Spectrum HoloByte's computer simulation.



A HIGHER LEVEL OF FLIGHT

Unlike some sims, which more closely simulate the arcade experience than the flying one, *Falcon 3.0* features a depth of play that almost rivals real life. Like real pilots, you'll fly with a wingman, allowing you to engage in aerial tactics like bracket maneuvers. Instead of enemies who fly in circles, *Falcon 3.0* adversaries fly according to true fighter doctrine so they're no pushovers. And Kuwait looks like Kuwait since real geographic theaters are faithfully mapped.

With Falcon 3.0, up to six players can go mano a mano. May the best man win.

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Falcon 3.0 lets you fight as part of an entire campaign. The missions you fly play a crucial role in your side's success. But they're not hard-wired. Each result affects the overall war effort—and determines your next mission. Succeed

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and go on to hit the enemy in his own backyard. Fail and find the bad guys breathing down your neck.

FALCON 3.0 vs. MiG-29

Electronic Battlefield Series simulations link up. So you don't just choose your mission, you choose your aircraft. Care to fly for the other side, comrade?

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The simulation for people who want to fly the not-so-friendly skies.

Spectrum HoloByte

ELECTRONIC BATTLEFIELD SERIES

The fight of your life.

Product Information Number 112

NEW RELEASES AND UPGRADES

FLIGHT SIM 5.0 GOODIES

Mallard Software has a wide range of enhancements and upgrades ready for **Microsoft**'s *Flight Simulator 5.0*.

First up, three new scenery upgrades for *5.0* will give users a bird's-eye view of Washington D.C., Las Vegas and Lake Mead, and Portland, OR. The scenery kits will retail for $49.95. A *Real Weather Pilot* enhancement ($39.95) will add even more realism to the *5.0* environment.

Mallard also plans to release *Flight Adventure 825* ($29.95), the first adventure program for *5.0*. *FA 825* will take the pilot along a randomly chosen flight plan from JFK International to Boston, Martha's Vineyard, or Providence. Unlike adventures designed for *FS 4.0*, *FA 825* is self-contained, with no add-ons required other than *FS 5.0*.

Other flight goodies in the works include *Tower* ($69.95), which offers users the chance to take charge of air traffic control and ground operations via a 360-degree scrollable view from the flight tower. And in a joint project with **BAO**, Mallard plans to release *Flight Shop* ($49.95). Users can build planes from scratch with their own flight characteristics and performance levels, or choose from a number of pre-built aircraft. *Flight Shop* will also feature an adventure factory that allows users to create their own flight adventures.

HOME IMPROVEMENT THROUGH SOFTWARE

Abracadata, Ltd. and **Gametek** both hit the market with new software for home design and landscape architecture.

Abracadata, Ltd. released enhanced Windows versions of their *Design Your Own Home Series: Architecture, Interiors, Landscape* and *Sprout!* (suggested retail price, $59.95 each). **GameTek** released a new *Advantage Point Series: Interiors*, *Landscape* and *Kitchen and Bath* (suggested retail price $39.95 each).

Among the similarities between the programs are the abilities to install hundreds of pre-drawn or self-designed objects, from furniture to appliances, and access multiple views and overlays. The landscaping programs provide an aging feature to help envision what your yard will look like in days, months or years to come.

Abracadata has also released *Design Estimator*, offering beginner and expert menus, instant totaling, "what if" capabilities, an extensive help system, tutorials, markups and unlimited bid items. Existing sample price books can be edited with local costs to obtain more accurate estimates.

PLAYBOY HELPS YOU ORGANIZE?

The *Playboy Electronic Datebook* ($59.95) from **Playboy Enterprises, Inc.** combines the look and feel of a notebook planner with the speed of organizational software. The product will feature five different at-a-glance views, including day, week, month, year and to-do lists that provide a graphic schedule overview and an address book and a built-in audio alarm to remind the user of important events. The real selling point for what is likely to be rather standard productivity software, however, is the inclusion of high-resolution graphics of more than 50 women from the pages of *Playboy* magazine.

FIRST LOOKS AT THREE HOT NEW GAMES

U.K. developer **Sales Curve** has acquired the rights to *The Lawnmower Man*, and has put together an impressive game based on the film. Using some

The Lawnmower Man

of the same technologies and imaging used in the movie, the game's full 3-D rendered graphics create an convincing image of what roaming about in cyberspace would be like. Looks like this one may offer much more user control than most of the "sit back and watch" CD-ROM titles we've seen so far.

We enjoyed **American Laser Games**' debut CD-ROM release *Mad Dog McCree*, so we were excited to hear that their next title, *Who Shot Johnny Rock?*, should be

Who Shot Johnny Rock?

out by the time this issue hits newsstands. *Who Shot Johnny Rock?* takes place in a gangster-filled 1930s. Game play looks to be similar to *McCree*, with plot changes dependent on the player's sharpshooting ability, but the digitized video should be even better than in *McCree*.

Freelancer, a 3-D action game with a perspective similar to the one in *Wolfenstein 3-D*, is scheduled to be released in March by **Electronic Innovative Design**. Set on a space station in the distant future, *Freelancer* pits you against bloodthirsty mutants, as well as other opponents who are attempting to accomplish the same goals as you. The graphics and animation are excellent, and EID has spiced the action with a lot of strategy — instead of simply blasting everything you encounter, you can use your wits to trap creatures and opponents alike inside rooms and corridors. The preview version we saw looked

Freelancer

hot, and EID plans to release the game on floppies and CD-ROM.

WOLFENSTEIN 3D COMES TO RETAIL OUTLETS

The complete six-game *Wolfenstein 3D* series, created by **ID Software**, is being offered for the first time through select retail outlets by **GT Software**, a division of GoodTimes Entertainment. *Wolfenstein* will retail for $59.95. GT is also shipping *Commander Keen: Goodbye Galaxy!* ($29.95), also created by ID Software.

COMPTON'S GRABS HEADLINES WITH NEW PATENT

The big story in the computer software industry involves **Compton's NewMedia**'s acquisition of U.S. Patent #5,241,671, for the "Multimedia search system using a plurality of entry path means which indicate interrelatedness of information." The patent allows that Compton's invented and owns the system, commonly used in multimedia applications, in which a database can be referenced and cross-referenced by accessing inter-related words, phases, and other media — in other words, hypertext!

In a surprise announcement at this year's Fall COMDEX in Las Vegas, Compton's revealed that it had been granted the patent, which in many ways gives Compton's the credit for inventing multimedia itself. Even among the press people attending the announcement, reactions ranged from shock to indignation. If the company was hoping for congratulations and support, it was disappointed.

It seems certain that other software companies won't support the Compton's announcement, as the ramifications of this patent grant are far-reaching indeed. Since the patent gives Compton's ownership of a widely employed system of database organization and presentation, multimedia encyclopedia publishers such as **The Software Toolworks** and **Microsoft** might be forced to pay royalties to Compton's if they want to keep using the patented process.

But the fact that the Patent Office would grant this patent at all comes as a big surprise to many in the software industry. The search system covered under the patent has been used in encyclopedias and other databases for years, and many see this grant as proof that the Patent Office is woefully behind the times when it comes to ruling on computer technology.

Compton's also announced a licensing program for present and future developers who want to continue using the search systems covered under the patent. The licensing program consisted of several options, ranging from entering into a joint venture with Compton's to accepting a royalty payment structure. Those who sign prior to June 1, 1994 will pay reduced royalties.

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MERGERS & PARTNERSHIPS

Sierra On-Line has signed an agreement to acquire **Coktel Vision S.A.**, a French publisher best known for the *Goblins* series, *Inca*, and its *ADI* educational products. The transaction should provide Sierra with an opportunity to expand its sales and distribution of educational software into Europe.

Though **Phillips Media Electronic Publishing** still thinks it can make its CD-I system the dominant CD-ROM format, the company has now begun branching out into CD-ROM for home computers. Phillips has signed an agreement with **Interplay Production** that will give Interplay exclusive rights to distribute three CD-I titles for both DOS and Macintosh computers. The titles are *Voyeur* (starring Robert "I Spy" Culp!), *Caesars World of Gambling*, and *Zombie Dinos from the Planet Zeltoid*. All are expected to be shipped by the third quarter of 1994.

Microleague Interactive Software announced an agreement with **Starbyte Software** of Germany to publish and market Starbyte's product line in North America. Among the titles to be released here will be *Space Job*, *Hannibal*, and *Rings of Medusa Gold*. Distribution will begin in early 1994.

In an affiliated-label agreement with **AVTEX Interactive Media**, **Spectrum Holobyte** will provide sales and marketing support for AVTEX's *Milliken-AVTEX Interactive Learning* line of children's educational multimedia software. This marks Spectrum's first venture into the edutainment market.

Software publisher and developer **Crystal Dynamics** has attracted **American Laser Games**, an innovator of real motion picture video arcade games, to its Publishing Partner Program. American Laser Games, whose titles include the impressive PC CD-ROM and 3DO title *Mad Dog McCree*, is the first company to sign on with Crystal Dynamics' new affiliated label venture designed to assist other 3DO developers.

Maxis will sell and distribute software for two East Coast companies: **Miller Associates**, makers of *Maxis Baseball for Windows*; and **CyberPuppy Software**, makers of *Kid's Studio*. Maxis also announced the opening of a European marketing office.

Time Warner announced a publishing agreement with **Software Sorcery**, creators of *Jutland*, to offer three CD-ROM titles: *AEGIS: Guardian of the Fleet*, *Fantasy Fiefdon* and *Dead Zone*.

Hi Tech Expressions has created a new division, **Ultra Tech**, to provide sales, marketing and distribution support for third-party entertainment software. Currently, **Hi Tech** has third-party distribution agreements with **Capcom** and **Acclaim**.

NEW HARDWARE RELEASES

REELMAGIC UPGRADE KIT

Sigma Designs — whose *ReelMagic* add-on board allows ordinary PC systems to playback full-screen, full-motion video and CD-quality stereo sound — has announced the release of the *ReelMagic CD-ROM Upgrade Kit*. The upgrade kit includes a double-speed, MPC Level 2 CD-ROM drive, a pair of speakers, an array of entertainment and educational titles, and the *ReelMagic* card, all for a suggested retail price of $849. The kit will also come with CD-ROM versions of **Activision**'s *Return to Zork* and **Aris Entertainment's** *Video Cube*, *Worldview*, and *MPC Wizard*.

Other titles just released for the *ReelMagic* board include *The Sporting News Multimedia Pro Football Guide* and *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia Version 2.01*, both by **Compton's New Media**; *Animal Kingdom* by **Aris**; *Dragon's Lair* by **ReadySoft**; and *Manitee* and *SoundTrack* by **Access Softek**.

SOUND BOARD SCOREBOARD

MediaTrix has released the Audiotrix Pro sound board ($295), based on the OPL4 chip by Yamaha, which permits 24 voices of Wave Table sound and 20 voices of FM synthesis to be output simultaneously. The card also includes a general MIDI voice bank and a 16-bit audio codec. An optional effects processor is also available as a daughter board, adding such effects as echo, reverb, flange, distortion, panning and surround processing.

Advanced Gravis is making available a new sound driver for the Gravis UltraSound wave table audio board. The Mega-EM will be available directly from Advanced Gravis. The Mega-EM will provide emulation of the Roland SCC-1 and Roland MT-32 sound platforms for games and applications that do not support the Gravis UltraSound directly.

In related news, **Psygnosis** has released *Hired Guns*, the first game to take advantage of Gravis' 3D Holographic Sound. The Ultrasound's 3D sound effects are stunning, and should make for a much more realistic gaming experience.

NEW GAMECARD FOR JOYSTICKS

Suncom Technologies has released the Gameport 2000 ($29.95), an advanced gamecard for joystick-to-PC interface that will work with PCs running at any speed. In addition to unlimited speed compatibility, The Gameport 2000 features simple "plug and play" installation, two joystick ports for multi-player software, and **Suncom's** exclusive *Audio Link Cable* with *Audio Jack* output for improved sound from your PC speaker.

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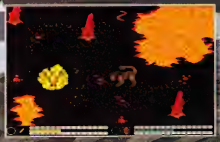

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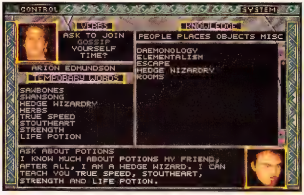
ALTERNATE LIVES

FANTASY • ROLE-PLAYING

DAEMONSGATE, AND ROLE-PLAYING'S SEVEN DEADLY SINS

NEIL RANDALL



It's probably going to seem like I'm picking on an undeserving victim, but **Electronic Innovative Design**'s *Daemonsgate* managed to appear at exactly the moment I was trying to figure out why the design of role-playing games seems to have grown stale. The basic reason is quite obvious: role-playing games (RPGs) are successful, and inevitably spawn imitators, and the imitations tend to almost always deliver less than the original which inspired them. Add the fact that these things take a long time to design, and you're likely to see the imitators months or even years after the originals — during which time technology and

game design theory may have undergone radical rethinking.

But there's another reason the RPG field seems stagnant: Ambition. Serious RPG designers want their games to have the largest number of options, the most fully developed world, the longest playing time, and the most complete simulation of the concept of adventuring against evil. Nothing wrong with that, of course, unless the ambition stands in the way of producing a playable game. When the trees block your view of the proverbial forest, the whole experience becomes needlessly unsatisfying.

Now, *Daemonsgate* isn't necessarily guilty of all these offenses. Nor is any other individual game. *Daemonsgate*, in fact, is a very good fantasy RPG, one that shows considerable care in its design and that unquestionably gives players their money's worth. But don't expect the razzle-dazzle of a *Betrayal at Krondor* or *Ultima Underworld II*; *Daemonsgate* has been in the works for over two years, and delays — including a change of publisher — have kept it from reaching the marketplace until now. As a result, it *looks* like a two-year-old game.

In *Daemonsgate*, you maneuver a party of adventurers across the fictional world of Hestor, visiting cities and castles, encountering friends and enemies, fighting battles and casting spells, all in an attempt to rid your world of a host of powerful demons. You work from a 3/4 overhead view in the cities, and from a fully overhead view on the world map, and the graphics range from fair to good. A long game, *Daemonsgate* features innovative magic and combat systems, and generally attempts to establish a realistic sense of the complexities of such a quest.

But the game demonstrates the problems of the role-playing genre so well that I'm going to use it as the focus for my discussion of the genre's seven deadly sins — sins, keep in mind, that not all role-playing gamers will agree *are* sins.

1. **Forcing the player to spend an entire evening just starting the game.** Here, *Daemonsgate* is *not* guilty. The game is refreshingly easy to get into. But far too many RPGs force you to create characters, read weighty introductions, and even do such stupid things as arm your characters and have them memorize spells — all before you even know what the game is about.

2. Assuming that the player has done all this before. When it comes to a novel design, there's no such thing as a veteran gamer. Practically all major RPGs operate on the assumption that players understand they'll be taking on the role of a character or controlling a party of characters, that they'll explore landscapes and interact with people in these landscapes, and that they'll find themselves in a quest with all sorts of important distractions from that quest. Small wonder the RPG gamer population has just about stopped growing: Learning many RPGs is harder than learning how to use a spreadsheet.

Daemonsgate shares this problem with the genre. If you've never played an RPG before, this game won't help

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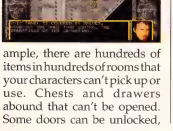
you get started.

3. Instilling in the player an immediate feeling of aimlessness. This is a sin almost all RPGs are guilty of. You start the adventure in the middle of a street or at an inn, with no idea where you are or what you're supposed to be doing. You don't even know how you got here, nor do you have an orientation for the place itself (as if you've been teleported into it). Successful role-playing demands background and knowledge of surroundings, as well as a very real sense that there's a *reason* to be in the place you've found yourself. You should also have at least an indication of what you should do next.

At the start of *Daemonsgate*, you're standing in a town inn. The introduction gives you an idea of what you should be striving for, but not enough to get you going. Basically, you just try some things out and see what transpires, and that's just not good enough: It makes it all too easy — and tempting — to forget the whole thing.

4. Present the player with things he cannot interact with. In the real world, anything or anybody I see is fair game for my interaction. Since RPG worlds are supposed to simulate real ones, this should hold true for them as well. Far too often, it doesn't.

In *Daemonsgate*, for example, there are hundreds of items in hundreds of rooms that your characters can't pick up or use. Chests and drawers abound that can't be opened. Some doors can be unlocked, while others are simply scenery and can't be entered. In most buildings, even if they're empty, you can't set up camp and rest.



The result of all this is frustration: if you see one thing you can't access in any way, how do you know which things *can* be accessed? By trying every single item? I don't care if the interaction does me no good, I simply want the option. It may well be stupid and unethical to break into someone's house in the middle of the afternoon, but the game should let me decide whether or not to do so — and if it's indeed the wrong thing to do, punish me for it then.

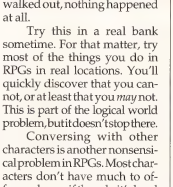
And there's another result: the feeling of being ripped off. If a building has no entry points (and I'm not talking about secret entrances or special codes here — those are okay), it's just a hunk of screen real estate taking up space. No thought has gone into its design or its reason for existence, and that doesn't bode well for the rest of the game.

5. Placing the player in an illogical world. Here, *Daemonsgate* fares better than most. There's a reason for things being the way they are, and as the game progresses logical events take place. Underground areas are not crawling with beasties, and finding anyone who can actually help you is rare. This is all good, because it makes sense.

There are a few exceptions, but in most fantasy RPGs logic has little place. Characters band together for no apparent reason other than strength in numbers, and evil beings who terrorize the world can't seem to kill off even the puniest minions. Dungeons contain ecosystems that defy biology, physics, and geography, as well as every other science. Huge dragons appear from nowhere, often in groups of three or more, to do raging battle in a corridor ten feet tall by eight feet wide, while around the next bend a group of seven zombies and five hill-giants wait to get their hands on you should you survive the first encounter. What these beings eat, or how they procured their arms, is apparently not to be asked. They've simply been there for hundreds of years, procreating in some absolutely unknown way.

Another piece of usual illogic is the flow of time in these games. Here, too, *Daemonsgate* does quite well. In most games, you can sit around and heal for days on end while nothing goes on around you (this despite an earlier warning of the desperate nature of your quest). If time doesn't drive the quest onward — to *some* sort of conclusion — what will?

6. Asking the player to do things that simply do not make sense. In my first *Daemonsgate* session, my character wandered into a bank, walked behind the counter, saw something on a table, and picked it up. Only then did I discover that I'd just picked up a bag of gold. Obviously, I should have been arrested or at least stopped, but when I turned and walked out, nothing happened at all.



Try this in a real bank sometime. For that matter, try most of the things you do in RPGs in real locations. You'll quickly discover that you cannot, or at least that you *may* not. This is part of the logical world problem, but it doesn't stop there.

Conversing with other characters is another nonsensical problem in RPGs. Most characters don't have much to offer, and even if they do it's hard to keep track of who said what. *Daemonsgate* provides a good system for maintaining a record of what you've learned, although many games do not. But what is difficult in *Daemonsgate* — and in many other games — is asking useful questions in the *first* place. It's frustrating not to be able to ask what's foremost in your mind, and just as frustrating to get only half-baked answers.

Finally, there are the puzzles and mazes. Unless they're an integral part of the game's environment, necessary to the formulation of the alternate world, they shouldn't be there. So boycott: stop when you get to one. Happily, *Daemonsgate* fares well in this regard.

7. Using an interface that discourages the player from doing important things. *Daemonsgate* uses a mouse-driven menu system to control character actions. It works, but in some ways it's extremely clumsy. But then again, so are most RPG interfaces when it comes right down to it. Especially objectionable are those that force you to shift among two or three screens simply to pass a hunk of bread from one character to another, or that make you do three or four different things to get one more crucial thing (such as memorizing a spell) accomplished.

Daemonsgate demonstrates the problems of the role-playing genre so well that I'm going to use it to discuss the genre's seven deadly sins — sins not everyone will *agree* are sins.

On a slower PC, this means halting the flow of the game — hence the story — for little useful purpose. If a book did this, you'd throw it away in disgust. So why should games — which by their interactive nature should be more involving than a book — be any different?

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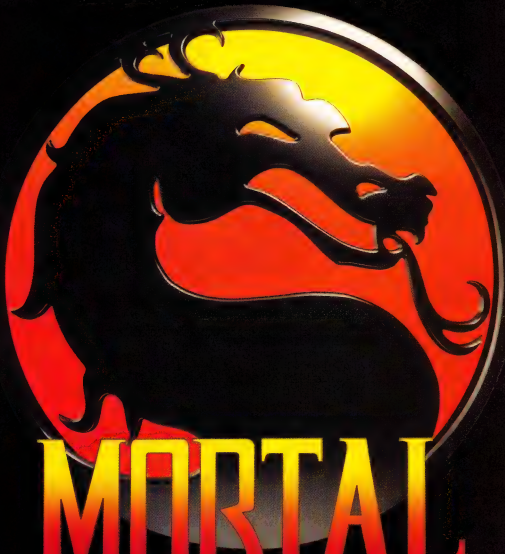

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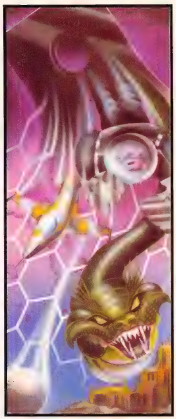

EXTENDED PLAY

ADD-ONS • SCENARIO DISKS • UPGRADES • BUG PATCHES

B-WING: THE REBELLION ADDS A NEW STARFIGHTER

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B-Wing

The Rebels just got a new weapon in their fight against the Empire, and space may never be the same again.

Tour of Duty: B-Wing, the latest add-on for *X-Wing* from **LucasArts**, introduces a formidable new craft to the Rebel Alliance. A bit of a hybrid between the Y- and A-Wings, the B-Wing blends heavy shielding with a dazzling array of weapons. The result is a heavy assault starfighter which is a bit on the sluggish side, but makes up for it with fierce firepower consisting of triple ion cannons, triple laser cannons, and dual proton torpedo launchers carrying 6 torps each. When you're packing that much heat *and* have shield ratings almost twice that of any other ship in the fleet, you can afford to be a bit pokey.

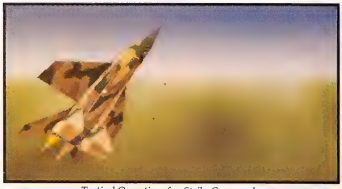
TOD: B-Wing adds three new Tours of Duty with a total of over twenty missions, and takes us through the Rebels' search for a new base. Many of the missions involve corvettes and frigates, which seem a lot less vicious when you're in a B-Wing. New proving ground missions are included, as well as some new historical missions. You also have the ability to replay some classic *X-Wing* battles in the B-Wing, where both its strengths and weakness become apparent. All in all an excellent, entertaining new disk for *X-Wing* fans.

Strike Commander Flames the Turkish Taxman

If you made it all the way to the end of **Origin System**'s *Strike Commander*, chances are you're eager for more high-flying carnage. Rest easy, fighter jocks: the *Tactical Operations* disk for *Strike Commander* offers 24 new missions, some new story lines, and several enhancements.

Missions take place in such new locations as Syria, Hawaii, Ireland, South Africa, Siberia, and Nicaragua. The story begins six months after the conclusion of *Strike Commander*, with the Turkish government levying some pretty high taxes on mercenary outfits like yours. The Syrians and Prideaux's Jackals have thrown in with the Turks, and you begin *Tac Ops* with some non-paying strikes on Syrian airbases. After that it's off to series of missions in new lands, involving convoy protection, deep strikes, and lots of dogfighting.

The F-22 plays a large role in these ops, and you'll run into some new threats, such as the F-117, the F-4, and the B-1B. Other treats include full rudder control support, a new MIDI sound option, and a "realistic" flight mode that adds a somewhat more authentic modeling to flight dynamics and fuel consumption. The new features, missions, and a healthy dose of cut-scenes comes at a cost of 11 megs for a full install (7 megs for a partial install), bringing the total *Strike Commander* space requirement up to an unconscionable 53 megs. The good news is Origin has released the whole kit-and-caboodle on CD-ROM.



Tactical Operations for *Strike Commander*

Empire Deluxe Scenarios

The compulsively playable *Empire Deluxe* comes with a powerful world editor that *anyone* can use to build a wargame. **New World Computing** has collected the best scenarios designed for *Empire Deluxe* into the great new *Empire Deluxe Scenarios*. With over 40 brand-new *Empire* battles, two small utilities, and a bug patch included, this disk will please every *Empire* player. Among these forty scenarios are world conquests, the Civil War, World War II, the Bolshevik revolution, the Gulf War, and several science-fiction wars. Quite a few are designed by well-known figures in the wargaming commu-

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Firestone Country Club for *Links 386 Pro*

nity, such as James Dunnigan, Jerry Pournelle, Noah Falstein, Will Wright, Don Gilman, and others. The maps range from amusing exercises in geometry to painstakingly detailed maps of actual areas. New utilities include "Empstat," which calculates land-mass statistics about any map, and "Randmap," which randomly chooses a saved map for play.

New *Links* Courses

The indefatigable *Links* team is pumping out superlative courses so fast we can't even keep up. *Firestone* and *Pebble Beach* are the latest courses from **Access** for the *Links* family of products: *Links 386 Pro*, *Microsoft Golf*, and plain-old-*Links*.

Firestone takes you out to the Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio at the height of autumn, and the result is simply gorgeous. This relaxing, tree-lined course is captured just as the leaves have changed color. Veteran course designer Robert Trent Jones created a deceptive course of mostly straight lines, with a few gentle doglegs. The fairways can play havoc on golfers with a weak long game, however, and though the bunkers tend to be small, they're optimally placed to snare the average drive or chipshot. The 16th is particularly harrowing.

But not even the 16th at Firestone prepared me for the nightmare that is the world-class *Pebble Beach* course in California. Quite possibly the finest public course in the world, Pebble Beach is laid out along the lovely shores of Carmel Beach, and has a deceptive beauty that can lull the unwary into recklessness. No hole on the entire course has an easy approach, and some require serious practice and failure to find just the right angle of attack. A preponderance of sea-side holes, blind hills, sharp angles, wide bunkers, and stepped fairways make *Pebble Beach* the best and most challenging course yet produced for *Links*.

In Other News...

San Francisco, the first scenery set for *Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0*, is now available from **Mallard**, with more to come from both Mallard and **Microsoft**. *San Francisco* offers 17 megs worth of lovely Bay area sights, including quite hand some landscape modeling and almost a dozen new airports. Among the sights you'll see are downtown San Francisco, Candlestick Park, Alcatraz, Napa Valley, and the Golden Gate Bridge.

While the scenery set offers better graphics than *MFS 5*, be warned that it also greatly reduces smoothness on "slower" machines. Mallard's minimum system requirement of a 386/33 and recommended system of a 386/40 is pure fantasy. With full detail on (why would you buy a scenery disk just to turn the detail off?), the planes are *extremely difficult* to handle on even these machines, and a 486 is almost a requirement.

If you're like me, you couldn't get enough of *Syndicate*. So for us carnage lovers, **Bullfrog/EA** has just released *American Revolt*, featuring some incredibly difficult battles to put down unrest in North and South American. *American Revolt* also offers two new features: the clone shield, which makes a cyborg look like a regular Joe; and air strikes, which can be called down upon large concentrations of enemies. Buy it.

San Francisco Scenery Disk for *Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0*

Earlier this year, **Domark** released *AV8B Assault Harrier*, one of the most unique flight sims ever. While *AV8B* was a touch weak in flight visuals, the new and improved *SVGA Harrier* rights this problem with slick new SVGA graphics. But be prepared for some possible headaches if your SVGA card doesn't use an S3 chipset.

Among CD-ROM enhanced products this month are *Indian Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* (**LucasArts**), among the best voice-over CD-ROM productions yet released. As with *Day of the Tentacle*, the voices add much to the action and the story, and are quite well done. **Software Toolworks** has brought its successful *Mario is Missing* to CD-ROM with lots of video and expanded audio, while **SSI** now offers *Tony La Russa Ultimate Baseball II* — with all add-on disks, more sound, and digitized Hall-of-Fame portraits — on CD. *Dark Sun* and *The Eye of the Beholder* Trilogy are also available on CD, but as with all SSI CD-ROMS, they must be loaded onto the hard drive. **LucasArts** has also released *Air Combat Classics* in both CD-ROM and floppy versions. The collection includes *Battlehawks 1942*, *the Finest Hour*, and *Sercet Weapons of the Luftwafft* with Tour of Duty disks.

Bug Patches

Contact game publishers for info on bug patch availability

- *Dark Sun*: Fixes WaveBlaster problems, crashes, and loss of NPCs. Also available is SOUND_DS.EXE, correcting problems from multiple sound cards.
- *Empire Deluxe for DOS V.3.11*: Corrects minor bugs, for V.3.10 users. For V.3.00 users, a separate patch is available.
- *Master of Orion*: Corrects *.LBX crashes and some diplomacy problems.
- *Microsoft Flight Simulator 5.0*: Fixes fatal-error and crash problems on Pentiums.
- *MiG-29* (V.1.0) and *Falcon* (V.3.02): Updates to MiG V.1.01.1 and Falcon V.3.02.1.
- *Rules of Engagement* V.1.06: For people with a Viper video card.
- *Simfarm*: Patch for people who cannot see the mouse.
- SSI Waveblaster fix: Adds Waveblasters support to SSI games.
- *Tony Larussa Ultimate Baseball II*: Corrects replays, injured player display, crashes, and tallying of pitchers' errors, but some other bugs have apparently not been addressed.
- *Tornado* V.1.0c: Adds pedal control, the ability to save flight plans in campaign mode, and a new warning sound for enemy missiles, as well as improved and expanded joystick calibration and function.
- *War In Russia V.1.1*: This Grigsby patch (NOT from SSI) fixes three bugs and adds an enhancement.
- *Warlords II V.1.02a*: corrects certain VGA card and sound driver bugs.

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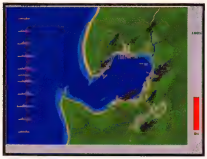
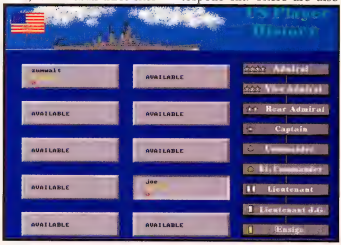


A week or so before QQP's *World War II: Battles of the South Pacific* landed on my desk, I'd just completed the second of two campaign games in *Gary Grigsby's Pacific War*. I began in late June and finished in mid-October, playing about 90 minutes a day — it's *big*, all right — so it was almost impossible for me not to compare the two games once I'd gotten into QQP's latest.

Battles of the South Pacific and *Pacific War* are very different in their approaches to the subject matter, but a comparison of the two seems appropriate. After all, I figure anyone who's interested in buying the QQP game either has already played *Pac War*, or is still struggling to learn *how*.

There is a temptation to be facile and describe *Battles of the South Pacific* as *Pacific War Lite*, but that would be unfair. The "liteness" derives from the fact that QQP's program allows you to do virtually everything, on a tactical level, that you can do in SSI's much more vast simulation, but enables you to do those things by means of an interface that, while still plagued with its own quirks, is much cleaner, much more intuitively laid-out, and much easier to learn.

QQP's simulation does not have the epic scale of *Pacific War* — you can't re-fight the *entire* war, starting on December 8, 1941. But its three enormous Campaign scenarios (average playing time for the Coral Sea campaign is 100-plus hours!) certainly leave room for many variations in strategy, often with surprising results.



In addition to the three monster scenarios, there are three moderately involved Battle set-ups, including two historically based battles (Midway and a simplified Coral Sea) and one might-have-been (Yamamoto) that's predicated on an all-out Jutland-type encounter between *all* the major surface elements of both the U.S and the Imperial Japanese Navies. So far, this is my favorite scenario: a real slugging match that is delicately balanced at the start, but whose outcome can be decided by a single lucky torpedo hit. There are also eleven Quick Game scenarios — some of them very interesting — that require only an hour or two to play.

One thing I found eternally frustrating in *Pacific War* was the fact that it was virtually impossible to bring on an intentional surface engagement. In QQP's game, however, it's virtually impossible *not* to. Obviously, the guys at QQP love the spectacle of surface warfare, because the battles screens are full of arcing tracers, waterspouts from near-misses, and neat flame-and-smoke effects — accompanied, as is all the ac-

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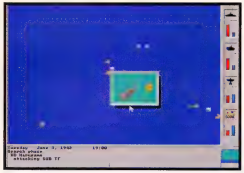


tion in this game, by excellent sound effects.

On the downside, though, you get to implement only the crudest kind of tactical control over these surface engagements. Basically, the fleets line up and shoot at each other for an hour's worth of game-time, and the side with the biggest guns usually wins.

Before your fleet opens fire, percentages indicating your chance of hitting that target are displayed beneath any ship in range. But I found these numbers so wildly inaccurate as to be almost worthless. While the game may say you have only an 11 percent chance of hitting a ship, in reality every firing ship will hit any ship it targets 30 to 75 percent of the time, unless the firing ship is so badly damaged as to be on the verge of sinking.

Back on the strategic map screen, QQP lets you interrupt things to issue new orders whenever you desire — a *big* improvement over *Pacific War*'s hands-off-until-the-turn-is-over system.

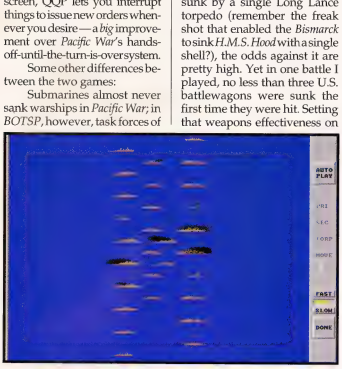
Some other differences between the two games:

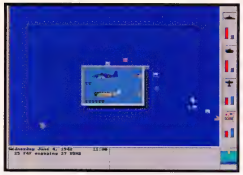
Submarines almost never sank warships in *Pacific War*; in *BOTSP*, however, task forces of subs can be deadly tactical assets. Even if you've "lost" on the surface, you can still obtain a "draw" verdict with a few well-placed subs.

Shore batteries were just factored into the data base in *Pacific War*; in *BOTSP* they're not only present, but they're about five times deadlier than they ever were historically. In fact, they're perfectly capable of decimating a transport fleet if not constantly suppressed by air attack or shelling. The shore battery action screen, incidentally, is a beauty.

The default setting for weapons effectiveness in *BOTSP* is termed Realistic, but seemed to me to be grossly exaggerated. While I admit it's *theoretically* possible that an Iowa-class battleship could be sunk by a single Long Lance torpedo (remember the freak shot that enabled the *Bismarck* to sink *H.M.S. Hood* with a single shell?), the odds against it are pretty high. Yet in one battle I played, no less than three U.S. battlewagons were sunk the first time they were hit. Setting that weapons effectiveness on very weird orders. No flight officer in his right mind, for example, would relegate lumbering, weakly armed Dauntless dive-bombers to the role of Combat Air Patrol, yet the computer does so routinely, and there's no way you can order it not to. Naturally, attacking Japanese Zeros chew the Dauntlesses to shreds, leaving you with greatly weakened counterattack forces. This little quirk is just plain screwy.

Battles of the South Pacific gives you the same level of tactical control as *Gary Grigsby's Pacific War*, but QQP's game sports a cleaner interface that's more intuitive and easier to learn





Minimal rectifies this problem somewhat, but it also means a lot of indecisive battles.

BOTSP can be played with either of two sets of rules: basic and advanced. Game play is *significantly* better on the advanced level. In fact, I wouldn't bother with the simplified system at all; on the basic setting, your computer-controlled "first-mate" will issue some very weird orders. No flight officer in his right mind, for example, would relegate lumbering, weakly armed Dauntless dive-bombers to the role of Combat Air Patrol, yet the computer does so routinely, and there's no way you can order it not to. Naturally, attacking Japanese Zeros chew the Dauntlesses to shreds, leaving you with greatly weakened counterattack forces. This little quirk is just plain screwy.

One place where *Pacific War* really shines is in its challenging recreation of the complexity and awesome logistical challenge of launching a major amphibious landing. Here, I'm afraid, QQP's game falls curiously flat. Astonishingly, the manual contains no section specifically devoted to amphibious landings! Instead, you're forced to make inferences from several wordy and nearly unfathomable sections about infantry combat, and figure it out by trial and error.

This brings up an area where *BOTSP* just can't compare with *Pacific War*: documentation. Surely QQP has reached sufficient economic stability to hire a professional writer/editor to bring their manuals up to snuff. I'm sorry, guys, but enthusiasm is no substitute for clarity. Take the following specimen: "Any supplies that are with your attacking infantry will do damage equal to 150% of the damage done by a normal infantry unit..." How? By throwing them at the enemy?

Okay, I *think* I understand what that means, but only because I've played so many PC war games. To the novice gamer, that sentence might as well have been written in Serbo-Croatian.

There are many messy and ambiguous areas in *BOTSP* that cry out for a few good, well-illustrated tutorials, but the manual contains not one. If the writing were better, it wouldn't matter so much. The only illustrations are some remarkably crude line drawings (including one on page 11, so help me, of an officer in the Nazi *Kriegsmarine*! Must be part of that legendary South Pacific U-boat flotilla...), culminating with a perfectly horrible line drawing on page 91 that looks more like the doodling a bored teen might do in study hall. Come on, QQP, you can do better!

Verdict: *Battles of the South Pacific* has competent graphics, a well-designed interface, and it can be loads of fun to play. There's the heart and soul of a really lovable game here, but its documentation is more than a little slovenly and, on the tactical level, the battles verge on arcade-like simplicity. A bit more emphasis on real naval tactics would immeasurably improve the game's realism.

So far, Grigsby still rules. But James Dunnigan's long-awaited *Victory at Sea* is about to debut, so stay tuned.

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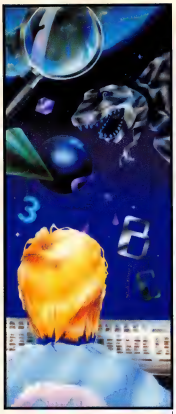

THE LEARNING GAME

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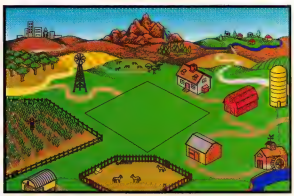
KID CAD: A POWERFUL TOOL FOR THE BUDDING ARCHITECT

HEIDI AYCOCK

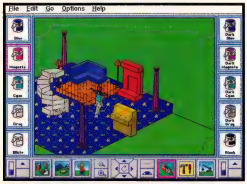


Many parents share the same dilemma: They get their kids what seems to be the coolest electronic toy ever invented, and the kids end up playing with the box the toy came in. Adults have a hard time remembering what they liked as kids, and kids don't know that they're supposed to like the toys that dazzle adults.

Kid CAD, from Davidson & Associates, is a fine example of this story, but in reverse. To most adults, the program looks like a complicated sphinx of a puzzle. To kids, the complexity and flashy presentation make *Kid CAD* a satisfying tool.

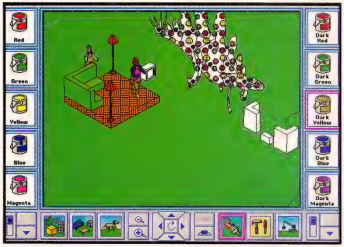
Kid CAD is a scaled-down computer-aided design (CAD) program that allows children to build three-dimensional structures onscreen. The program includes a collection of building objects, tools, paints, and demolition equipment presented through a simple and nicely animated interface.

Davidson accepted a mammoth challenge when the company's designers decided to create this program; CAD packages are complicated, enormous monsters that are difficult for most adults to learn, much less kids. Even before I'd seen *Kid CAD*, I had to wonder how a child was going to conquer the difficult concepts involved in using such a program.



The package is undoubtedly attractive, but I was stumped by it: I found the program unbelievably difficult to use. While the interface is friendly, the basic rules of the *Kid CAD* universe are obtuse and complex. I could figure out how to grab a block, but I couldn't predict where it would fall once I released the mouse button. It took me more than an hour to figure out such basics as how to place one block next to another and how to stack one block on top of another. Never mind that I couldn't find a roof for my structures once I had built them.

I liked the sharp, colorful graphics, but also found them to be deceptive. Sometimes a block would appear transparent, and other times a block would sink halfway through another block. I even had trouble filling some blocks with color.



The tools are powerful, but limited. I could link blocks, for example, so they would retain their spatial relationship when I copied them. Once linked, though, they all had to be unlinked at the same time — the copies *and* the originals. Because there was no way to undo mistakes, I hesitated to experiment as I explored — and what's exploration without experimentation?

Even after 12 hours of playing with the program and poring over the thin manual, *Kid CAD* seemed so unpredictable that I couldn't build a simple fort out of building blocks. But I was having a great time — even when I occasionally felt like putting a brick through my monitor.

I found myself wondering why Davidson — a company that's built its reputation on educational products — would market such a difficult program to *kids*. At the risk of sounding egotistical, if I was so puzzled

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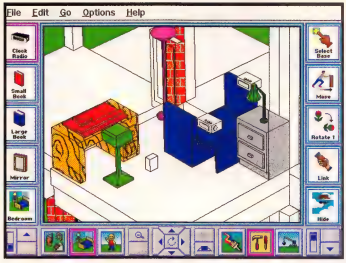
by *Kid CAD*, how could a child possibly manage it? So I called the company.

Members of the *Kid CAD* design team explained, first, that the program required several technical compromises. They had to balance speed of feedback with accuracy of feedback — thus the transparent bricks. They had to simplify the tools so that kids learn to use them easily, which resulted in the lack of control over fine details. In attempting to find the easiest metaphors for three-dimensional construction in a two-dimensional world and the simplest translations of adult-oriented CAD systems, the designers imposed some rigid and clumsy rules on the *Kid CAD* universe.

They assured me that they'd tested the program with focus groups of children, and it had won rave reviews. Whether the kids were attracted to the design tools, the painting tools, the demolition tools, or the animated interface, most of the test groups loved *Kid CAD*.

According to the designers, kids don't look at creative projects in the same way adults do. When something goes wrong in an adult's project, he or she sees a disaster. But a child might see new possibilities. While adults might get angry because they can't build the house they'd envisioned, kids just alter their plans to accommodate the newest development in their project. Besides, said the designers, the animated interface was entertaining enough to hold some kids' interests until they were developmentally ready to tackle the design portion of the program.



Kid CAD brings the power of computer-aided design to the younger set. But are your kids ready for it?

All the designers' answers sounded reasonable enough, but then again what else would you expect them to say? So I asked a few of the *real* experts — the children who'd participated in the *Kid CAD* testing.

Margaret, 9 years old, said science and art are her favorite subjects in school. Garrett, 8, said he likes math and recess. And Marshall, 12, said he's a fast runner and good at social studies and language arts. Three kids with different interests, but they all love *Kid CAD* -- even after several months.

Margaret said the program's menu was easy to use. Although she found it difficult to build things, this didn't bother her very much. In fact, even though it took her about a week to build her first house, she said "It was exciting to finally finish because of all the time it took." For her, the program was more interesting than frustrating. She especially liked the interface and the sounds.

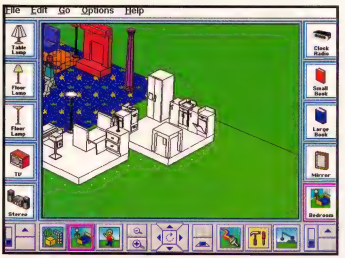
Garrett responded to *Kid CAD* in the same way. He had trouble figuring out how to get the blocks to go where he wanted, and he couldn't find a roof for his building, but he still enjoyed the process of exploring and experimenting. "It's worth all the work when you're done and you've built something," he said.

His older brother, Marshall, offered a different perspective. He said *Kid CAD* worked a lot like Legos, but "you have unlimited blocks [with *Kid CAD*] and with Legos you have to buy more." Like his brother, he wasn't discouraged by the time it took to construct a building: "If it went too quick, it wouldn't be that fun."

I also talked with John Brim, of the Media Evaluation Services of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Educational Media and Technology Services. He said the program would be great for children who enjoy challenging puzzles, aren't easily discouraged by frustration or failure, and enjoy seeking multiple solutions to problems. "It's not going to be for everybody, but it will be perfect for some students," he said. Parents simply need to determine their kids' learning styles and interests before investing in *Kid CAD*.

While I feel better about recommending *Kid CAD* now, I still have complaints. For example, I strongly object to any creativity program that doesn't include a powerful Undo feature. And I don't think the program's 30 page manual is adequate; a program as complex and challenging as *Kid CAD* requires more comprehensive documentation, as well as an extensive online tutorial. Davidson should explain the underlying rules of the program, as well as the explicit features.

Despite these shortcomings, though, *Kid CAD* offers children a creative experience that certainly encourages determination and patience. If your children like good puzzles, and if they can stick with a challenge without yanking out their hair (or yours), they're probably good candidates for *Kid CAD*.



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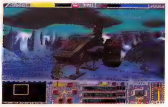

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Product Information Number 220

Leisure Suit

Shape Up or Slip Out

GARY MEREDITH

Tell the truth now. Were you really surprised when Larry Laffer — world traveler, aging sex toy, and poster boy for the polyester industry — ended up on "Stallions?" After all, the TV show has all the sexual sophistication of a junior high locker room. Just the place for our man Laffer. And yet Larry managed to parlay that famous Laffer luck into a crushing defeat, along with as much humiliation as three women can lay on a guy. But true to form, Larry landed on his feet when his consolation prize plopped

Wow, a hotel room with everything a guy could want — except maybe a mint on the pillow. Be sure to call and check out all *the hotel's "services."*

him down in the midst of a health spa, La Costa Lotta, populated by the usual bevy of beautiful and needy women. So just how will Larry manage to screw up this sweet deal?

Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out (make what you will of the title) is the fifth entry in the continuing saga of Larry Laffer. If greatness is a measure of perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds, then Larry is one of the truly heroic figures of our time. Although it's more likely that his mind has been addled by CRT radiation-generated off-gassing from his leisure suit, and he simply doesn't know when he's beaten.

Nope, our Larry doesn't have a clue — which, as usual, is where you come in. There are a lot of ladies at La Costa Lotta, and they'll promise Larry the world if only he'll do just one little thing for them. Of course, the little things aren't so little, and the promised rewards are hardly ever what they first seem to be. But that's the life designer Al Lowe has created for Larry, and it's mostly why we all keep coming back to experience the carnage of Larry's love life.

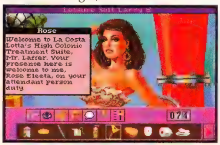
As with the other entries in the series, the best advice for playing *Shape Up or Slip Out* is to explore. You're not really under any specific time limit, and there's really nothing that your wits — or the game's option to back up a step and start over when you die — can't overcome. In fact this may be the most benign Larry yet, which is a bit of a disappointment. If you played the first game, *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards*, you may recall that there were no less than four ways to die at Lefty's Bar alone. This newest game seems to be an attempt to recapture the feel of

Just when you think you can't find any more goodies on the maid's cart, a change of viewpoint proves you wrong.

tLarry6:

The Life and Loves of Larry Laffer

that first adventure. And as far as the humor and the actual game play, it does. But the element of danger, so much a part of the early series entries, is missing here.


Leisure Suit Larry 6
Rose
Welcome to La Costa Lotta's Night Colonic Treatment Suite, Mr. Larry. Your presence here is most welcome. Rose Tiesta, at your aftershave parlor.
07:1

Rose is just the sort of friendly face a stranger likes to see. Unfortunately, your face isn't what she's thinking about.

As long as we're comparing past and present, it's interesting to note that *Shape Up or Slip Out* is very much a 90's kind of game in its attitude towards sex. These days, our Larry doesn't actually come too close to actual sex — a far cry from the early games, when he was dipping his wick regularly. So although the game is rife with raunchy double entendres and kinky foreplay, Larry never really gets to relieve his "tensions" until the final scene.

Anyway, the best strategy is to just explore at first. Pick up everything you can, regardless of whether an item has an obvious use in your scheme to get laid. Don't assume that you've scoured a scene until you've moved all around the area. Some important items can be overlooked simply because you weren't standing in just the right place when you made your search; You only have to look as far as the hallway outside your door to see what I mean. And *when* you look for something can be critical. Just because you didn't find anything the first time you searched an area doesn't mean you won't find something later on.

Once you've looked around as much as possible, you can start addressing the desires of the individual women. There's no hard and fast order for some of your actions, although it's clear early on that you'll have to find quite a number of items before you can grant the request of Gammie, the front desk clerk.

After checking into your room, you'll want to take advantage of all the in-room services the resort has to offer. Most of these will be dead ends (*amusing* dead ends), but a couple are essential to events that unfold later on in the game. While you're in the room, also check out the bathroom utilities for proper operation, and don't pass up the opportunity to snag any items you can from whoever visits your room.

Shablee seems to have just the blend of sweetness and exotic beauty Larry's been looking for since he lost his beloved Kalalua.

While you're acquiring all those seemingly useless items from throughout the resort, it's good to remember that you can sometimes combine items, using the pick-up icon. One situation where this technique comes into play is the swimming pool. You must somehow get into the pool to share a drink with Merrily, the kinky bungee jumper, but you can't go for a swim without a swimsuit. If you've been a good little cleptomaniac and pocketed every loose item you've come across — especially from the unattended maid's cart — you should have no problem fabricating a little swim ensemble straight from the pages of the Ujena catalog.

Also, remember that misdirection is a major part of Larry's *modus operandi*. Sometimes the direct approach just doesn't work, and you have to resort to the oblique thinking that's been a hallmark of the series since the first game, when you had to use a tv remote control to get past the pimp in the back room at Lefty's. So when Thunderbird's kinky suggestions in-

Although Larry has changed visually over the years, the heart of a survivor still beats beneath all that glaring polyester and those wide lapels. Unfortunately, it's pumping blood to a brain with the self-awareness of guacamole, and within a body even Hans and Franz couldn't whip into shape.

Larry has progressed from a nerdy, hopeless little dweeb with thin hair and even thinner hopes of scoring with the ladies, to, well, an older, nerdy, hopeless little dweeb with even thinner hair. But he has had some success in the sex department over the years. After a rocky start, it turns out that finding sex wasn't Larry's real problem. But steady sex — and more

Lefty's Bar, from the original *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards*

importantly, love — still seems beyond his grasp. Even though he might seem to be a winner by game's end, he's right back where he started by the time the next game rolls around. Eve, his first love, had grown tired of poor Larry by the morning after, while Kalalua, his wife from the end of the second adventure, had forsaken him by the beginning of the third game for the joys of playing "the little Dutch boy" with Bobbie, her lesbian lover.

Passionate Patti seemed to have real potential, lasting as she

A close-up of Larry (Yuck!) from the second game. No cute cartooniness here!

did for two consecutive adventures and even switching psyches with Larry for a time, but by the beginning of Larry's latest, *Shape Up or Slip Out*, our "hero" is back to looking for love in as many of the wrong places as he can find.

Still, there's been no shortage of women in Larry's life. And somehow, Larry manages to attract more than his share of kinky types. The lash and leather style of #6's Thunderbird cannot help but remind the Laffer faithful of the kinky old lady volve handcuffs, you realize the guard at the front gate is the only person you've seen with them. He's none too friendly however,

Things are about to get very hot and heavy for our boy... or should I be more gender-specific? Don't forget to come back here the next day, so that this "date" won't be a total write-off.

and no matter how sleazy he looks, bribery of any sort seems out of the question. So you'll have to distract him somehow.

Who's got more right to sing the blues than Larry Laffer? Burgundy's more country, though, and as Larry discovers, a real woman's woman. And she loves her breasts!, doesn't she?

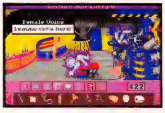
Simple, right? Well, it will be if you listened to what I said earlier about people visiting your room.

Misdirection of another sort involves your dealings with the tram driver, who looks suspiciously like a certain well-known and deviant game designer. He's got something — or to be more precise, six things — you'll need, but you can only acquire them by subtle subterfuge. And no, hitting him over the head with the wrench is not what I mean by "subtle."

You may think that getting Gammie trimmed down is the focus of the game, since it seems that most of your efforts involve repairing the liposuction machine in the Cellulite Drainage Salon. It's not, though sucking the glop out of Gammie's thighs is critical to your ultimate success. In fact, it's the only way to make something good come of your "unfortunate" experience on

Now that you've persuaded the tram driver to kill a few minutes — and lung cells — you can pretend you know what you're doing under the hood of his tram.

Thunderbird's the kind of woman Larry would beg, borrow, or steal for. So of course, he ends up doing all three.



From the moment Char and Larry met, he could feel the electricity between them. But the 50,000 volts surging through him now is more than he had in mind.

MAN ENOUGH — A GAME EVEN LARRY WOULDN'T LIKE

While the Leisure Suit Larry games may have been among the first to bring sex to your PC, they certainly aren't the only ones to bank on the fact that sex sells. But from the digitized babes of *Les Manley: Lost in L.A.* to the soft-core anime of *Cobra Mission*, sex has always been presented in a setting that's obviously a game — until now.

Man Enough, from **Tsunami Media**, bills itself as a "CD-ROM multimedia dating simulation" and "The Ultimate Social Adventure." Everything about the game — from the reveal-all outfit on the model on the front of the box

to a "Mature Level" disclaimer — hints at R-rated entertainment, but if that's what you're expecting you're going to be mightily disappointed. Come to think of it, you're likely to be disappointed, period — *Man Enough* may well be the most tedious, sophomoric, and poorly executed game we've seen in a long time.

Here's the premise: a friend who's feeling sorry for you because of your lack of luck with the ladies has refers you to the Man Enough dating service. Jen, the owner of Man Enough, tells you that if you manage to date five of her clients, you'll get to go out with her.

Convincing one of the Man Enough girls to go out with you is a matter of repeatedly selecting the appropriate "line" from three possible dialogue choices. As a matter of fact, that pretty much describes the *entire* game. Each date follows the same pattern: You select, say, 15 correct responses in order to get a phone number from a woman; you call her up and choose 15 more correct responses before she agrees to actually go out with you; 15 or so more responses on the way to the "date" (ranging from a romantic dinner to a game of *paintball*); 15 more responses during and/or after the date, well, you get the idea.

And what a poor idea it is. The only time full-motion video is used along with the dialogue is when

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Cast a spell
Make a mistake
Go to #*%!!

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Product Information Number 106

Larry's lovin' drove his wife, Kalazua, into the arms of another woman.

aboard the cruise ship in Larry #2. And who can forget Miss Love'em and Leave'em (tied to the bed) from *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards*?

Will Larry ever find true happiness, and dump his leisure suit forever? Well, the 70's retro look is the "in" fashion statement these days, so I doubt he'll ever retire his signature wardrobe. But someday, he may find the love of his life. God knows he deserves it. I just hope Larry doesn't settle down before he and creator Al Lowe provide us with a few more

By the time of *Larry's 3*, the gals were looking good even in 16 color EGA!

episodes in the life of history's greatest loser. Make that second greatest loser, if you count the guy who parachuted into the Bowe-Holyfield fight.

— Gary Meredith

the beach with Shablee.

Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out, despite being much tamer on the sex front, does manage to recapture the grungy charm of the first game. With newer, more sophisticated video standards, many games have become almost photorealistic in appearance. Despite having the latest technology at their bidding, Al Lowe and his band of certifieds have chosen to retain the certain feel of the *Larry* series. Even the theme song is still the same — and considering how many times it's been played over the last seven years, it should be somewhere on Billboard's Top 100 by now.

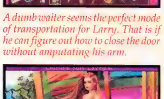
She seemed so sweet when you first met, but Gammie has become awfully demanding now that slimmer thighs are a distinct possibility.

With Larry, the more things change, the more they stay the same. For seven years, he's managed to avoid a lasting and meaningful relationship (not to mention Armani and HairClub for Men), and this newest installment gives no sign that things will change. The final scene sets things up quite nicely for another sexual disappointment, and at least one more adventure from the mind of Mr. Lowe. So slip into some manmade fiber — preferably something blindingly white — and dive into the Wonderful World of Laffer.

The drinks at the resort's floating bar could peel paint, but the company of the lovely Merrily makes Larry's heart leap. Somewhat prophetic, don't you think?

Not exactly the place you'd think to go for true enlightenment, but you'd be surprised at the things you hear at the end of a giant rubber band.

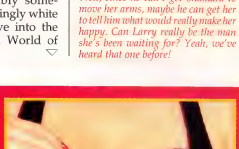
A dumbwaiter seems the perfect mode of transportation for Larry. That is if he can figure out how to close the door without amputating his arm.



Well, since he can't get Shamara to move her arms, maybe he can get her to tell him what would really make her happy. Can Larry really be the man she's been waiting for? Yeah, we've heard that one before!

you're talking to Jeri; the other girls only rate digitized photos during conversations. The dialogue is about as sexy as a ham-fisted drunk goosing the hostess at a cocktail party, and all your dates seem to be borderline psychos, flip-flopping between total adulation and complete disgust. One wrong response — and nearly all the responses are equally offensive — and the woman who was "ready for anything" a second ago will sort out an insult dripping with sarcasm.

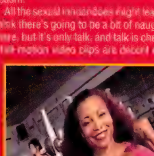
All the sexual innuendoes might lead you to think there's going to be a bit of naughtiness here, but it's only talk, and talk is cheap. The full-motion video clips are decent enough



but for a *Sam-CD* game they seem to be in short supply — many common scenes, such as you inviting Jeri back or hanging up the phone, are handled with a crude "slideshow" display of consecutive digitized pictures.

After working your way through five dates — and it is work — and going out with Jeri, you expect some kind of payoff, but even here *Man Enough* falls flat. The climax of the game (don't even think it!) is the unbelievable revelation that it's all been a joke, that there was never a chance for you to "score" in any way with these women. *Man Enough? Patient Enough* is more like it.

— Stephen Poole


1) I like to go to hot rock bars, heh-heh, if you know what I mean.
2) I'll be a confidential source if I could meet you late at night.
3) If you've got the time, I've got the videotape to last all

HE'S HERE, ON CD-ROM

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FUN

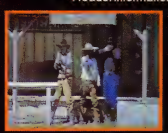
Mad Dog McCree

Shooting Game

The Arcade Smash Hit by AMERICAN LASER GAMES, INC

LIVE MOTION PICTURE ACTION

Product Information Number 135



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Survival of the Fittest

You know the feeling. You're shopping for a new game, only to find two or three titles in the same genre or with the same subject matter. Will *Dracula Unleashed* satisfy your fascination with the classic horror icon, or is the action of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* what you look for in a game? If there are two educational CD-ROM titles dealing specifically with the space shuttle program, you can't help but wondering how they stack up against each other.

Well, we decided to do something about it. Instead of running independent reviews of similar games, we've matched them up head-to-head, to let you know how they compare and which one has the features you want. We call it Survival of the Fittest — and may the best game win!

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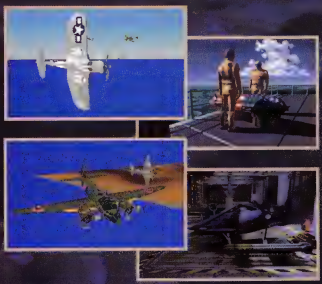

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Product Information Number 102

DUELING DRACULAS

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Dracula Unleashed

Dracula Unleashed

Viacom New Media's *Dracula Unleashed* has grand pretensions to becoming a worthy addition to the vampire legend. An ambitious game, it shows both the strengths and the weaknesses of interactive CD-ROM gam-

Dracula Unleashed

ing to this point. From the opening notes of the impressive musical score and the first scene, it's obvious a lot of time has been spent making this game as arresting as possible. Many of the screens are reminiscent of the ornate frontispieces in the finely bound books of the last century. And the orchestral score, dark and powerful, sets the tone admirably. All in all a good-looking game, beautifully mounted, and evoking a time of oil lamps, burled walnut studies, and horse-drawn hansom cabs.

You may have detected a "but" lurking in the above paragraph, and you'd be right. I've got a couple of big reservations about this game, and the biggest is the acting. *Dracula Unleashed* uses full-motion video for it interactive scenes, and from a purely technical viewpoint they work quite well. I just wish there was something on the screen worth seeing. The acting is almost uniformly atrocious. The actors — using the term in its very widest sense — seem to come from two widely divergent schools; they're either voracious scenery munchers, or espouse the Rigor Mortis method. The guy who plays the character Goldacre looks like Tony Orlando and emotes like an Al Pacino wannabe, while the actor portraying the mad Stransokowski looks like an adult Ron Howard and emotes like Judy Garland. The hero is as nondescript as the photo that comes with a new wallet and emotes like...well, like a wallet. It's as though most of the actors tried to use the old silent movie strategy of overacting to compensate for the lack of sound. I guess they figured that going over the top would come across better on CD-ROM. As for the stiffs in the cast, I guess they just knew somebody who knew somebody.

Another "but" comes from my frustration with the game's rigid mechanics. The basic design is great; very simple and intuitive, it's easy to get into the game with little or no manual study. There's even on-line help from Doctor Van Helsing himself, delivered in a voice that reminded me more than a little of Professor Ludwig van Duck.

No, the interface itself is not the problem: it's the way you must handle items in your possession. In most graphic adventures, you have immediate access to all your possessions, all or most of the time. With *Dracula Unleashed* you can have only one active item at a time, and that must be acquired from your "satchel" before you enter a particular scene. So, for example, if you continually visit Harker's office only to receive a brusque brush-off, you can bet it's because you don't have the right item *in your hand before you enter the scene*. This means you must save a game, and keep going back through the same scene until you hit upon the right item. Some situations are so obvious that you can easily guess beforehand what item you'll need in the scene, but there are a few situations that seemingly defy logic. This isn't as much of a problem early in the game, when you have only a few items, but it can be very frustrating once you've collected a full satchel.

This problem is made even more unbearable by the fact that *Dracula Unleashed* often demands that you be in a given scene at a set time. And too often, there's just no way to know that you should have been visiting location A at 11:25, and not pursuing a lead at location D. Success becomes a matter of keen hindsight, and not the result of any detective work on your part. Combine the problems of being in the right place at a given time with having the right item in hand, and you're left with more trial-and-error frustration than the game's graphical wizardry can overcome.

This is a beautiful game, visually stunning and finely detailed. If lovely graphics and great sound are your main criteria for judging a game, then *Dracula Unleashed* won't disappoint. The actual gameplay just doesn't cut it, though, turning your initial enthusiasm for the look of the package into a refrain of "if only..."

— Gary Meredith

Bram Stoker's Dracula

It seems vampires are big business these days. Anne Rice's vampire novels are still zipping off the shelf, new collections of vampire short stories are popping up on a regular basis, and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, the Francis Ford Coppola movie based on the classic novel, did very well at the box office. So the move from film to video game was inevitable — you could almost hear the marketing promoters scrambling to slap the Dracula name on as many products as they could. **Psygnosis** grabbed the PC game rights, and produced *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. But as is so often the case with titles based on big movie licenses, the game has lots of background and setting, but not much in the way of game play.

Obviously influenced by Id software's popular *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Dracula* pits you against armies of the undead instead of Nazi guards. You're Jonathan Harker and, armed only with a knife and a pistol full of silver bullets, you're out to save your fiancee from the

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Product Information Number 182

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bloodthirsty count. In each of the four levels, you have to destroy a certain number of vampire coffins to move on to the next level. At the end of each round you'll face Dracula himself in one of his many different forms, and attempt to end his legacy of evil.

Bram Stoker's Dracula

Bram Stoker's Dracula

Although *Dracula* looks fairly good, there's nothing extraordinary about the graphics. The backgrounds and characters are about average when seen from a distance, but break up into pixels as you approach them. *Wolfenstein 3D* works the same way, but *Dracula*'s graphics just aren't as good.

Sound in the game is only tolerable. Footsteps sound like a horse trotting, not a person walking. And when you destroy a coffin, you're rewarded with flat-sounding chimes that get very repetitive as the game wears on.

Fortunately, control of your character is a good deal better than either the graphics or sound. You move through the game, viewing the action from a first-person perspective, by positioning the cursor above the center of the screen and clicking to move forward, or below center to move back, etc.. Unfortunately, Psygnosis opted to use the right mouse button for both attacking and picking up items. So if you attempt to pick up an item too early, you often shoot your gun instead and waste valuable ammo.

While *Dracula* really isn't a bad game, it certainly could have been much better. Just a bit more work maybe some smoother graphics, better sound, and other touches — would have improved the title quite a bit. But as it stands, fans looking for a game with the feel of the film will come away disappointed, and *Wolfenstein 3D* veterans probably won't think much of it either.

— Trent C. Ward

OF PAWNS AND PCS

Chess programs for the PC have reached new heights in recent years. 20 years ago, chess programs were little more than exercises in how to program — designing one that could defeat a master was considered the first step toward creating true artificial intelligence. Now, chess programs have advanced so much that they can defeat all but the best human opponents.

With that newfound power, programmers have realized that chess simulations for home PCs can also be *instructional*, offering the player a tutor who explains *how* the game is played; who patiently teaches the hundreds, even thousands, of opening move variations; who explains the basic principles behind certain strategies; and who tells *why* one move is better than another.

Now come three of the strongest chess programs ever designed for home use: **Electronic Arts**' *Kasparov's Gambit*, **The Software Toolworks**' *Chessmaster 4000 Turbo* for Windows and **Machiavelli Designs**' *Socrates*. Any one of the three is a match for all but the finest players in the world, but each is unique in how it presents this classic game.

PART I: BASIC FEATURES — AND MORE

There are some features that anyone familiar with chess programs simply assumes will be in new products. Features such as loading/saving games, printing move lists, setting up positions, solving for mate, and taking back or forcing moves have become so standard that you'd be shocked not to find them. And, sure enough, all three programs have these standard options.

Kasparov's Gambit

But once we get beyond these basics, we see the first big division among these programs: Simply put, *Socrates* does not attempt or claim to be a tutor. It's main focus is on sheer strength of play, and lacks the bells and whistles that distinguish the other two programs.

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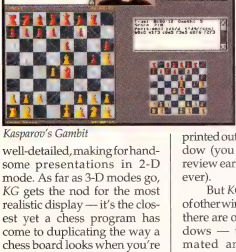
Product Information Number 113

Look and Feel

Chessmaster 4000 Turbo and *Kasparov's Gambit* both offer SVGA displays; *KG* also has a standard VGA display, but it's not nearly as attractive. Piece designs and screen layout are



Kasparov's Gambit

well-detailed, making for handsome presentations in 2-D mode. As far as 3-D modes go, *KG* gets the nod for the most realistic display — it's the closest yet a chess program has come to duplicating the way a chess board looks when you're sitting at a table. But *CM 4000* offers many more pieces in 3-D mode — dinosaurs, Napoleonic soldiers, insects, and oceanic creatures, to name a few — and also features a customizing option that lets you adjust the size, color, and perspective of the board. It's a very impressive package.

Socrates doesn't fare well in this category. It only offers a 2-D board, and then only in one size. And its flat 16-color graphics will take you back to the days of when EGA was at the forefront of technology.

Window Dressing

In addition to the board and pieces, basic displays offered by all three programs are move lists, chess clocks, and thinking windows that show both the computer's current line of analysis and the best line of analysis it has found to that point. The thinking window also displays who the computer thinks is winning and by how much.

Perhaps the most unique feature of any of these programs is *KG*'s coaching window, which displays current World Champion Garry Kasparov via digitized video and speech offering advice, hints, and occasional words of encouragement or warning, as well as a list of the last few moves. You can get Kasparov's advice at any time by clicking the hint icon, but occasionally he'll offer unsolicited comments ("Thadn't considered that move."). The longer the time limits you've set for the game, the more thoughtful his analysis. A sound card is obviously needed for the digitized speech, but Kasparov's comments are also printed out in the move-list window (you can't scroll back to review earlier comments, however).

But *KG* is limited in its use of other windows. For one thing, there are only three other windows — thinking lines (animated and text-only) and move list — and those can only be displayed in 2-D mode, though they can be moved and sized.

CM 4000, on the other hand, shows what can *really* be done with display windows. *CM 4000* has *ten* optional display windows — move status, game clocks, natural language analysis, thinking, best lines, move lists, captured pieces, legal moves, annotation (for jotting down your comments on a move), and chat for sending messages when playing a human on a LAN or via modem. What's more, all the windows use a Bakelite-style frame that gives the whole affair a cool art-deco look.

That's a lot of options, but *CM 4000* makes things simple by offering default setups such as War Room (emphasis on thinking and best lines), Table Top (a handsome 3-D perspective) or Personal Guide (with the "Mentor" offering natural language analysis and advice), to name a few. There's not space enough to fit all of the windows on screen at one time, but the ability to size each window means you can set up the display that's perfect for you — and all the windows can be accessed in 2-D or 3-D modes.

Time Controls

The more time they're allowed to consider each move, the stronger these programs play. Time control variables let you set games from quick (blitz) to longer, tournament-style games in which you might have, say, 60 minutes to make your first 40 moves.

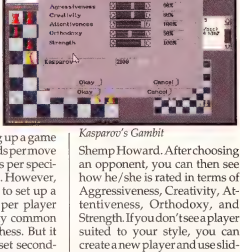
Both *KG* and *CM 4000* allow you to set different time limits for black and white, and both have options setting up a game by number of seconds per move or number of moves per specified amount of time. However, *KG* lacks an option to set up a game for minutes per player per game — a fairly common setting for casual chess. But it does allow you to set secondary and tertiary time controls, much like in actual tournament play, and that's a feature *CM 4000* doesn't have. Here again, *Socrates* lacks the flexibility of the other two programs, allowing you only to set minutes per game or seconds per move.

Chessmaster 4000 Turbo

Strength and Style

Strength settings are at the heart of any chess program — without them you'd be stuck playing against an opponent that can beat 99.99 percent of the players in the world. Both *KG* and *CM 4000* come preset with an abundance of strength settings, allowing novices and experts alike the chance to compete against a roughly equal opponent.

Kasparov's Gambit has infused this part of the game with lots of personality — preset computer opponents range from Kasparov himself to historical figures like Marie Curie, Benedict Arnold, Spartacus, and

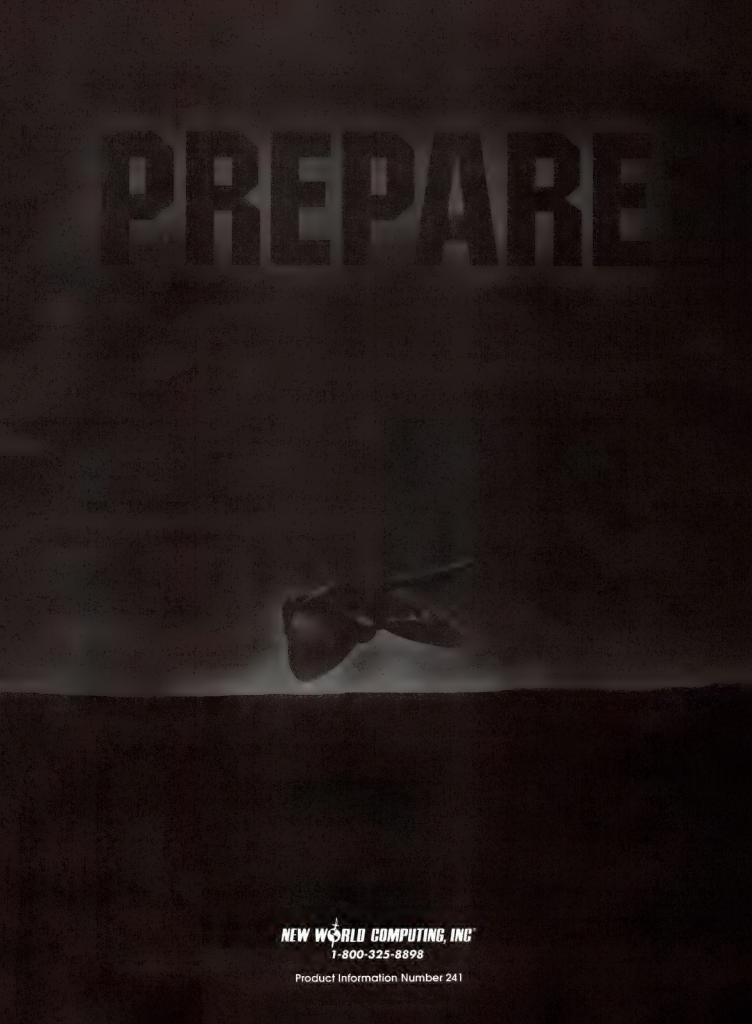


Kasparov's Gambit

Shemp Howard. After choosing an opponent, you can then see how he/she is rated in terms of Aggressiveness, Creativity, Attentiveness, Orthodoxy, and Strength. If you don't see a player suited to your style, you can create a new player and use sliders to tweak any or all of those variables.

CM 4000 comes equipped with so many style offerings you'll feel as if you're designing the game's engine itself. The settings are divided into three groups — Style, Positional, and Material. Under Style you can adjust settings for Attack Defender, Strength of Play, Randomness (the program randomly picks one move from several similarly rated possibilities), Opening Book Depth (how far into a game the computer will play established opening lines), Selective Search (how far the computer follows each line of play), and Contempt for Draws. Positional lets you adjust how much the computer values Pieces versus Position, Control of Center, overall Mobility, his King's Safety, and so forth. Finally, Material lets you determine how the computer rates the value of various pieces.

Even if you're a beginner, the inclusion of these sorts of settings will give you general insight into various chess concepts. And if you don't feel like



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Product Information Number 241

messing around with this many settings, there's a ton of preset styles named after the chess

Chessmaster 4000 Turbo

greats who made them famous — Alekhine, Capablanca, Fisher, Spassky, Seirawan (who helped design *CM 4000*), Tal, and many others. These are all much-appreciated attempts to limit programs from playing, as all programs tend to do, like machines.

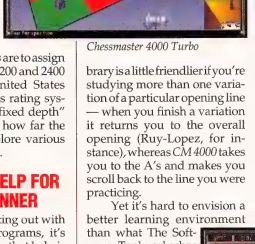
When it comes to setting the playing strength and style of the computer, *Socrates* doesn't begin to approach the options found in *KG* and *CM 4000*. Other than slowing down your PC's operating speed, the only ways to adjust strength in *Socrates* are to assign a rating between 1200 and 2400 (based on the United States Chess Federation's rating system), or use the "fixed depth" option that limits how far the program will explore various move possibilities.

PART II — HELP FOR THE BEGINNER

For those just starting out with chess or chess programs, it's reassuring to know that help is usually available at the click of a button. *KG* and *CM 4000* are very strong here, giving details of all program functions and glossaries of basic chess terms. Manuals for both programs are excellent, not only providing detailed help on how to use the programs, but also instructional sections on how to play chess. And *CM 4000* goes so far as to include histories of chess, chess computing, and *CM 4000's* creation and progress. *Socrates*, not having many features to begin with, has a single page of instructions describing how to activate each function.

Learning Options

CM 4000 and *KG* place great emphasis on providing guidance and assistance for beginning and intermediate-level players. And both do an excellent job of providing tutorials, describing everything from how the pieces move to positional strategies and opening move libraries. Though obviously designed with novices in mind, even experienced players can get in some good practice playing through the opening libraries. *KG's* opening library is a little friendlier if you're studying more than one variation of a particular opening line — when you finish a variation it returns you to the overall opening (Ruy-Lopez, for instance), whereas *CM 4000* takes you to the A's and makes you scroll back to the line you were practicing.



Chessmaster 4000 Turbo

Yet it's hard to envision a better learning environment than what The Software Toolworks has created for *CM 4000*. The "Mentor" does it all: There's an Auto-annotator for forming an analysis of your game; friendly Opening Practices; a Teaching Mode that lets you highlight special situations such as pinned pieces, skewered pieces, pieces in jeopardy, isolated pieces, and more; and the amazing Natural Language Advice dialogue box, which builds a down-to-earth explanation of what your next move should be and why.

Another learning device, especially helpful for users of chess databases, allows games to be imported for study — you can even use the auto-annotator to form an analysis of the entire game! Chess fans will save time and exasperation by not having to type in moves of their old games for study and analysis. The games do need to be in an ASCII format, but can be in any of several chess notations.

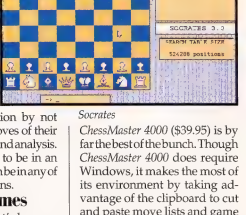
Classic Games

Another feature that's become popular with some of the top programs are libraries of Classic Games, literally hundreds of them covering famous matches from present day to over a century ago. Strong players will enjoy playing through these games, since they generally include expert annotations, and even novices will find it hard to resist the temptation to jump in and try out his or her *own* strategy!

PART III — THE FINAL ANALYSIS

All three programs require plenty of computing muscle — at least a 386DX/40 MHz — but to get the most out of *Kasparov's Gambit* and *Chessmaster 4000* you'll need SVGA and a sound card capable of reproducing digital samples. After all, what's the point of seeing Kasparov's talk without hearing what he has to say? And *Chessmaster* includes several soothing MIDI soundtracks you can listen to as you play.

All things considered,



Socrates

ChessMaster 4000 ($39.95) is by far the best of the bunch. Though *ChessMaster 4000* does require Windows, it makes the most of its environment by taking advantage of the clipboard to cut and paste move lists and game boards, not to mention the number and flexibility of display windows. Toss in LAN and modem support for human competition, as well as a feature to set up your own chess tournament, and you've got a package that can't be beat. In fact, I'd love to see how Software Toolworks could improve on this package.

If you're not a Windows user, *Kasparov's Gambit* ($39.95) is a good example of how a program can beat the pants off ya' and still provide all the features you expect in a commercial chess program. The inclusion of digitized speech and video of Kasparov is nice, but his advice is so cryptic that beginners are pretty much on their own when it comes to figuring out *why* he's told them to make a certain move.

With weak graphics, no sound effects, and no tutorial to speak of, *Socrates* should appeal to only the strongest players out there. At first glance it looks like something you might find in the bargain bin, but with a MSRP of over $100, you'll probably start looking for some other way to enjoy the timeless game of chess on your PC.

— Joseph Novicki

Chessmaster 4000 Turbo

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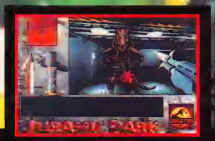

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Product Information Number 100

THE SHUTTLE AGE

Two new CD-ROM titles examine the latest step in man's attempt to explore the cosmos.

Space Shuttle

For the manned space program, the space shuttle is the only game in town these days, so it's no surprise that NASA's workhorse gets a lot of attention from software producers. Two CD-ROM programs that hit store shelves recently, **Software Toolworks**' *Space Shuttle* and **AVCA**'s *Shuttle Astronaut*, try to take an "edutainment" approach to the shuttle program.

Space Shuttle

Both *Space Shuttle* and *Shuttle Astronaut* claim to be games, but don't be fooled. These are educational products — and successful ones, though to varying degrees — but they are *not* games. That gripe aside, either program is worthy of recommendation as a multimedia learning experience.

Space Shuttle is clearly the better of the two, combining first-rate audio and video with loads of information in an attractive, easy-to-use package. Organized into orientation, training, and mission modules, *Space Shuttle* offers a comprehensive and entertaining look at the shuttle program.

Orientation gives you an overview of the space program and the Johnson Space Center in Houston. In the training module, you learn about various shuttle systems and the nuances of space flight. Here you'll find enough schematic drawings and data to satisfy any space nerd.

Space Shuttle really takes off when you go to mission control, where you can learn about 53 individual shuttle missions. You meet the crew, watch video of the launch, see video highlights of the mission, and watch the landing. The successes and failures of each flight are thoroughly examined through audio, video, and still photographs.

There's also a silly computer board game, in which the program asks some first-grade level questions. Answer them correctly and you move to the launch square, where nothing happens. Wow.

Just about everything in *Space Shuttle* is a delight for your eyes and ears. Photographs and menu screens are simply gorgeous, and while the videos are a bit grainy, they're as sharp as most you'll see in a CD-ROM title. The audio is outstanding, even the annoying "Mod Squad"-type music that plays every time you switch between modules.

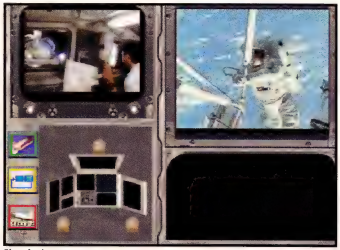
Shuttle Astronaut, the first title in AVCA's Career Adventure series, works in much the same way as *Space Shuttle*, but it's ultimately less successful. Instead of documenting each mission, *Shuttle Astronaut* focuses on the physics of space flight and the laws of science involved in various aspects of a mission, from walks outside the shuttle to the operation of the toilets.

After taking a multimedia lesson on one of seven systems or aspects of space flight, you're asked a series of questions. Answer them — correctly or not — and you get to go along for a ride on the shuttle. The graphics in this segment, shown in various segments that take you from the launch pad all the way to landing, are quite good. But like *Space Shuttle*, this isn't really a game. You don't control anything; you're just along for the ride.

The videos and still photos in *Shuttle Astronaut* are average at best. And while the audio is good, the accompanying text is plagued by ghosting, and is nearly illegible. But while *Shuttle Astronaut* doesn't look nearly as good as *Space Shuttle*, the program really shines as a learning tool. Topics from math and physics to biology are skillfully integrated to show how those often dry school subjects are put to work in real life.

Both these CD-ROM titles make learning about the shuttle program an entertaining experience, but *Space Shuttle* gets the nod here. It looks better, sounds better, and will keep kids interested much longer. *Shuttle Astronaut* contains more information — and in the proper setting may be a superior teaching tool – but it's not nearly as engaging.

— *Lee Buchanan*



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Product Information Number 148

DISCWARS: CD-ROM Showdown!

The new wave of CD-ROM gaming is here, and we're seeing some impressive-looking adventures with sound and graphics that put most disk-based games to shame. But are we truly in the midst of a revolution, or are we just getting a lot of icing and no cake?

The Labyrinth of Time

These four games have a lot in common. Obviously, they're all new CD-ROM titles. They're all "next generation" products, designed exclusively for this format as opposed to the collections of disk-based titles that lead the first wave of CD-ROMs. So, considering all those megabytes of storage space the games' designers had to work with, it would be natural to assume that we have some truly innovative titles here — but do we really?

The Labyrinth of Time

First up, there's **Electronic Arts'** *The Labyrinth of Time*. The premise here is that rotten old King Minos, of Minotaur infamy, has forced his scientist, Daedelus, to design the ultimate labyrinth: one in which the convolutions and turnabouts are so complex as to reach into time itself. With its access to so many historical periods, Minos' Labyrinth threatens the very fabric of time. You've been snatched from your humdrum existence to discover the secret of the Labyrinth, and to destroy it. To that end, you're plunged into the huge maze to solve its many puzzles and, hopefully, destroy the Labyrinth itself.

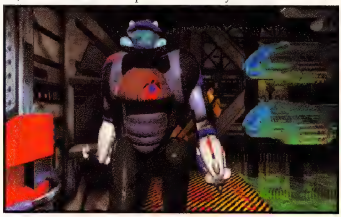
Once inside the Labyrinth, you can barely trust your own senses; What you see and hear are almost never what they appear to be, and even when things are real they don't work the way you'd expect them to work. You search for items and clues to help you, but in the end it's your ability to unravel even the most arcane Gordian knots that'll do you the most good.

The Journeyman Project

Quadra Interactive's *The Journeyman Project* mines much the same territory — the vastness of time. On an Earth three centuries from now, peace and prosperity have finally come to the planet. While the great majority of the world's people are busy getting ready for Earth's coming union with the Symbiotry of Peaceful Beings (an intergalactic federation of friendly folks), you're a member of the Temporal Protectorate, a government agency more concerned with monitoring the time continuum than anything else. The Protectorate's greatest fear is that someone may tamper with the natural order of things. They've deemed time travel to be a dangerous capability, and so only one time machine, Pegasus, exists. But the Protectorate must be ever-vigilante; If one time machine was created, who's to say others, from different time periods, aren't running around out there? So the Protectorate scrutinizes the time corridors, comparing a special disk containing the entire history of mankind (which has been secreted 200 million years in the past) with an identical copy to alert them to any time-tampering that might happen.

The Labyrinth of Time

Pegasus has been programmed to send agents back to any detected time rift. Encased in your BioSupport Suit, you're well-equipped to battle any transgressor, although your greatest weapon will be you mind. Before you can repair a time rift you must first find out



The Journeyman Project

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Product Information Number 132

just what it is, and you can only do that by carefully comparing the historical disk of 200 million years ago with its twin in the present. The discrepancies between the two logs will point the way to a solution.

Hell Cab

Hell Cab from **Time-Warner Interactive** involves time travel, too, although not in the way you'd expect. Here, a seemingly harmless trip to New York (is there really such a thing?) is the launching point for the strangest cab tour ever. After all, a ride in downtown New York doesn't usually include a stop at the Coliseum of Rome for a little gladiatorial fun in front of mad Emperor Nero, does it?

The Journeyman Project

You know something's up when the narrator of the intro sequence sounds like Rod Serling. Even when you notice that your cab's license number is 666, it's too late to turn back. Your driver, Raul, seems friendly enough until you arrive at your first destination. But then, no matter how much money you may have with you, it's never quite enough for the fare. That's all the leverage Raul needs to force you to sign over your soul. Just be sure to consider your answers carefully as you fill out the contract, since what you put down directly influences the readings on your "soul meter." And the more morally correct you are, the better your chances of surviving.

Hell Cab is time travel with an attitude, a game of choices and expediency. You're thrust back and forth in time, into situations that demand you make a judgement call of some kind. Whenever possible you should take the moral high road, because anything less will drain your soul meter. But, as in life, the choice is often not so simple. Sometimes the only way to survive a situation will cost you on the old soul meter, and other times taking the high road may be detrimental to your vital signs.

Hell Cab

Iron Helix

The odd man out in the group is *Iron Helix*, from **Spectrum Holobyte**. No time travel, just a good old-fashioned space opera. It's the far future, and a computer malfunction has set the space ship *Jeremiah O'Brian* on an attack run against the planet Calliope. Unable to divert his ship, the *O'Brian*'s captain mines the ship with the aim of destroying it before it begins its final assault on Calliope. But before the bombs can be set off, a mysterious virus kills the crew. In his last act, the captain leaves the bomb trigger codes in messages on terminals throughout the ship. It's up to you to discover the codes and destroy the ship by guiding a probe through the deserted vessel. Simple enough, except that a security robot continues to patrol the ship, treating any intruder, including you, as an infection to be eradicated.

To find the codes, you must explore the entire ship. Unfortunately some areas are restricted, sealed off by DNA-coded doors. To open these doors, you must also search the ship for DNA samples left by the crew — hair, skin cells, etc. — and match these samples to the doors. And all the while, you have to keep track of the security robot's whereabouts, keep your probe well-supplied with power, and keep your eye on the countdown clock.

Hell Cab

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Product Information Number 220

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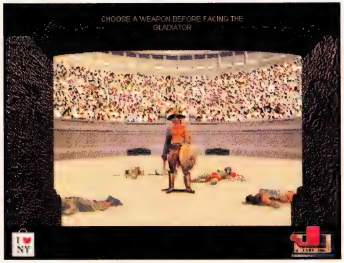
The Verdict

These are all huge games, with so many places (and times) to search that they require a modified approach to playing. When you're covering this periment as you do with the best hard disk-based games, and as a result there's always a real awareness that you're looking at a picture. While you may choose to go north, south, east, or west and explore another area, you're still only seeing a *picture* of that area. There's just not enough interaction to shake that feeling and fully immerse yourself in the game world.



Hell Cab

much territory, a crudely drawn map or simple memory just won't cut it. You'll also have to learn some patience. Most of the designers seem to delight in throwing in a lot of red herrings and deadends, just because they've got the space to do so.

And while the games are undeniably pretty, the lush graphics come at a price. Although there are many notable exceptions (and *Iron Helix* is among them), too often complete interaction within those beautiful scenes isn't possible. You don't have the ability to move around a scene and explore small views overall, and can be frustrating to players used to screen-filling graphics and characters who can roam freely.

Still, there's much to recommend these games. Again, the graphics are excellent, with photorealism taken to new heights. The sound and music in these games — especially through a 16-bit sound board — is fantastic. And all that CD-ROM storage space means there's more sound and music, and more variety.

Further, the games do exhibit individual personalities. The sense of humor in *Hell Cab* goes a long way towards making up for some of the tedious and sometimes pointless exploration you must do. *Labyrinth* possesses a strong cinematic quality, while *Iron Helix*, with the constant pursuit of the sentry robot and the time limit imposed, maintains a sense of drama and tension. Finally, *The Journeyman Project* charms by its quirkiness, a game that keeps you off-balance most of the time.

Iron Helix

and cockpit-style masking. *The Journeyman Project* also uses a similar "cockpit" approach.

Hell Cab and *Labyrinth* fill considerably more of your display. But even these games feature

Iron Helix

Even though CD-ROM has been around for quite a while now, it's evident that designers are still searching for how best to use the considerable resources of the format. The situation reminds me of the days when VGA graphics first came on the PC gaming scene, expanding the color palette available to game designers from 16 to 256. All the new colors, and the enhanced resolutions available in 16-color mode, seemed to enchant the designers so much that we began to see some very pretty games with no substance.

The same kind of thing seems to be going on with CD-ROM today, although these four games show that CD gaming is improving with each new title. Sure, there are still trade-offs. And these packages may present a different *kind* of gaming experience than you're used to. But if you can accept that, these new games are worth a look.

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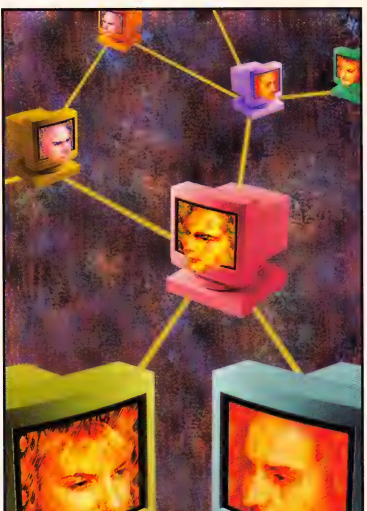
Product Information Number 102

THE HUMAN TOUCH



Role-playing games are fun, but no matter how well-designed, they just aren't able to duplicate the feeling of playing with — or against — a human opponent. Online services offer a a neat solution for those tired of questing alone.

BERNIE YEE

Multi-player role-playing games (RPGs) have been lurking on the various on-line services for some time now; **GEnie**'s *Dragon's Gate* and **CompuServe**'s *Island of Kesmai* in particular have attracted a devoted following. Those are text-based games, however, and not too attractive to gamers used to high-end graphics and sound. But the times they are a-changin'. According to noted industry figures like Lori and Corey Cole, designers of **Sierra**'s *Quest For Glory* series, the future lies in graphical multi-player RPGs.

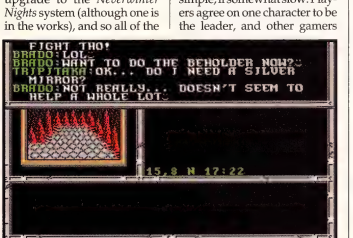
There are three main offerings today that hint at things to come, and all three offer that element you simply can't find in single-player RPGs: human interaction. Gamers can play together on a network, cooperating and exploring dungeons and other terrors together. Swapping hints or backing each other up in a tough fight makes the pen-and-paper role-playing experience unique — but that's about to change as more and more online services offer multi-player RPGs.

It's NEVERWINTER at America On-Line

America On-Line's *Neverwinter Nights*, a fantasy RPG set in the world of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D), has been up and running for some time now. The game takes place in the Forgotten Realms AD&D world, and is centered around the town of Neverwinter. Veterans of SSI's Savage Frontier series (*Gateway to the Savage Frontier*, *Treasure of the Savage Frontier*, etc.) will be familiar with the gaming environment of *Neverwinter Nights*, since the single-player and on-line versions feature similar geography.

But that's where the resemblance ends. The graphical front-end software for *Neverwinter Nights* is nearly identical to the early games in SSI's Gold Box series, like *Pools*

of Radiance and *Secret of the Silver Blades*, with their EGA graphics and very limited sound support. Although SSI eventually upgraded the Gold Box engine to VGA graphics and digitized sounds with the Savage Frontier series and other titles, there has been no upgrade to the *Neverwinter Nights* system (although one is in the works), and so all of the gripes about SSI's original AD&D engine still apply. Advancement stops around 12th level, and *Neverwinter* still uses the xenophobic 1st Edition AD&D rules, severely limiting non-human character advancement. Gamers have found a way around these limitations by developing characters to the 12th level, then switching class and starting to build experience there; a 12th-level Paladin/12th-level magic-user is a one-person wrecking crew.


FIGHT THO!
BRADD:LOL
BRADD:WANT TO DO THE BEHOLDER NOW?
TRYPTARA:OK... DO I NEED A SILVER MIRROR?
BRADD:NOT REALLY... DOESN'T SEEM TO HELP A WHOLE LOT
15,8 N 17:22
MOVE USE ARROW KEYS:
Neverwinter Nights

Despite its limitations, *Neverwinter Nights* is enormously popular. *Neverwinter* is huge, much bigger than any single SSI Gold Box game. And the best part is that you can hook up with one of many real-life players and trek around looking for adventure. Though there are few puzzles to speak of, the real attraction here is interaction with other players, and cooperation in achieving your goal. You can only create one character, which pretty much necessitates finding other adventurers who'll join you as you seek to build experience points. It shouldn't be too hard to find other gamers, though — *Neverwinter* may well be the favorite area of America On-Line.

Communications between gamers have been well thought out. You can post messages to all within your party, send private messages to individual party members, or "ESP" messages to anyone in the entire *Neverwinter* game world.

Game mechanics are simple, if somewhat slow. Players agree on one character to be the leader, and other gamers give their characters the command to Follow him or her. When groups get very large, movement can become awfully slow, and bad connnections and system problems sometimes cause players to lock up and get thrown out of the game. Your party can encounter another party in combat, and will have to patiently wait until that combat is completed before moving though, unless they want to join the combat — an impolite action if your party hasn't been asked to help.

Players seem devoted to this game — they've formed guilds, orchestrated alignment conflicts, set bounties on other players, and arranged for player vs. player combat and equipment swaps. Some have even become off-line friends, as Sharqua (an unusually helpful evil Drow) told me while I observed a big player vs. player spell combat. These types of players, committed to completely indulging themselves in fantasy roles, have made the game much more interesting in spite of the admittedly rough edges, and the success of *Neverwinter* can be attributed almost wholly to human interaction. Version 2.0 — with improved EGA graphics and tougher regions — will be released soon, and there are more revisions in the planning stages. Rumor has it, though, that another service may be starting up a new multi-player AD&D system.

MECHWARRIOR LIVES!

I was excited to hear that GEnie was host to **Kesmai Corp.**'s reincarnation of *MechWarrior*, an excellent EGA first-person role-playing game set in FASA's BattleTech universe. Originally sold as a stand-alone game by **Activision**, *MechWarrior* was set in the distant future, where wars are fought in huge, robotlike vehicles called BattleMechs ('Mechs for short).

Activision's *MechWarrior* was a combat simulator employing polygon graphics and offering a first-person perspective from inside the cockpit of these metallic behemoths. Success required some hand-eye, real-time coordination in a world full of detail and sci-fi whimsy.

Activision is nowdeveloping *MechWarrior 2*. But Kesmai took the basic *MechWarrior* engine and tweaked it for multi-player gaming on GEnie. Though the front-end graphics in *Multi-Player BattleTech* are almost identical to the stand-alone game, Kesmai has improved everything else about the game. The list of additions is extensive, the most notable of which is a mouse-driven, icon-based interface that allows you to visit different locations in each star system. You can find out where the action is by reading the news reports (which tell of victories and defeats), and ship yourself and your Mechs to the planet with the most strife.

Much of the game's fun lies in forming alliances and mercenary units with other players. When you start your career, you begin to amass funds by taking on missions for various political forces, battling computer-controlled opponents. As your fortune increases, you can acquire your own Mech, and even upgrade to better 'Mechs as time goes on; my alter-ego has a whole stable of different Mechs designed for specific purposes.

Teaming up with three other "lancemates" against four looming computer-controlled Marauders brings out the best quality of multi-player role-playing: cooperation. You can "chat" with your team members from the cockpit of your Mech, and the banter adds an immediacy to the game only weakly hinted at in games like *Wing Commander*, where you can only issue general orders to a computer-controlled wingman.

And when those competitive juices really start to boil, gamers can hop on a jump ship and head to Solaris, the game world where head-to-head human competition takes

Multi-Player BattleTech

place. Solaris is a sort of 35th Century-Coliseum, where MechWarriors duke it out for the entertainment of the galaxy, as well as for fame and fortune. In GEnie's *BattleTech*, Solaris serves a similar function as in the original *MechWarrior*, with Solaris providing the 'Mechs and humans providing the excitement. Crazy battle strategies that a computer could never think of get air time here — and sometimes it's the craziest strategies that work. The system keeps

evolving to respond to new game situations as planets are conquered and the balance of power shifts to various factions.

The programmers of multiplayer *BattleTech* seem to be very responsive to gamers' suggestions. Playing an early beta version of the game, I recommended that gamers be given the option to name their 'Mech, and the designers at Kesmai quickly implemented the feature.

Other than the graphic display of the polygon 'Mechs walking around, little of the original Activision game remains in the GEnie incarnation. In addition to vastly improved intelligence of computer opponents, Kesmai is in the process of adding some 'Mech types that are in the pen-and-paper game but were omitted from the computer translation. And like *Neverwinter Nights*, the players here are devoted, readily organizing into groups and alliances. Look for *Multi-Player BattleTech* to grow and develop well into the future. Hopefully, Kesmai will allow head-to-head combat on the planets on which players carry out missions, not just in the arena on Solaris.

THE SHADOW KNOWS

Perhaps the slickest multiplayer role-playing game yet to emerge is also the only one I tried that *originated* as a multiplayer concept. **The Imagination Network** (formerly **The Sierra Network)** is home to *The Shadow of Yserbius*, a feature attraction in the "Medieval Land" section and the most popular activity on the entire network. Billed as a "cyberspace theme park," The Imagination Network is designed exclusively as a place for people to play and chat: no stock quotes, no shareware downloads, no binary-file uploads. And that single-minded vision makes The Imagination Network a fun place to hang out. Gamers can fly against up to three other players in *Red Baron*, play cards and flirt with other gamers in Larry Land, and, of course, explore the *The Shadow of Yserbius*.

This place is called the Hall of Doors.
Most doors lead nowhere. Others lead to wonders.
You encounter 2 Wolves.
A Battle Begins!
2 Wolves attack Bustaquest causing 6 damage!
Bustaquest attacks Wolf but misses!
The Shadow of Yserbius

Yserbius is a first-person point-of-view game that resembles *Eye of the Beholder*. You can see other people in the dungeon by their outlines (nothing detailed — technology is still limited), and even engage them in combat. (Player vs. player combat is only partially supported in *Neverwinter Nights*, where spells can be cast at other live gamers but no physical combat is allowed.) The game plays much like a good stand-alone fantasy RPG, except for the fact that other people are playing right alongside you. A particularly humble character (most likely a female character, since the vast majority of players online are men who will gladly help a damsel in distress) might easily find his or herself the recipient of all sorts of assitance from the more experienced gamers roaming the hallways. The sense of fun and community is especially evident on The Imagination Network.

One of the initial complaints about *Yserbius* was the daunting inequality of the game. Newcomers were running into human opponents who were virtual demigods, players who had logged tremendous amounts of hours playing the game and using several undocumented "cheat" features in the game to enhance their player's abilities. Of course, this is true of any online game where people have been playing for some time, but Sierra decided to do something about it. For one thing, they closed the cheat loopholes and put out a boxed version of *Yserbius*; improved graphics and interface, along with stand-alone playability, meant that it was possible to build up your character a little and get acquainted with the game system before venturing on-line. And what's more, Sierra is opening a new area, dubbed *Twinion*, with new mazes, more monsters, and more money!

The Shadow of Yserbius

THE FUTURE'S SO BRIGHT

Other game networks are beginning to emerge, like MPG-Net, and software publishers are beginning to realize that modems are the key to ultimate entertainment, even if gamers aren't members of online services. **Origin** plans to implement a head-to-head option in the next installment in the Wing Commander universe, and **Spectrum Holobyte** has already included head-to-head and network play options in its Falcon 3.0 series. It's much more fun to shoot down a live pilot than a computer drone, and having the wizard next to you — even though "next to you" is really 2000 miles away — offer your knight suggestions on how to swing his sword makes play much more vibrant, much more in keeping with the true spirit of role-playing than any current stand-alone computer game could hope to be.

REACH OUT AND SLAY SOMEONE

Telecommunications and on-line service charges have become increasingly affordable, so there's no excuse not to log on. Today, 14.4K modems are now absolutely affordable and often have fax capabilities as well. U.S. Robotics, AT&T, Supra, and Zoom Telephonics all have affordable, reliable, Hayes-compatible modems for under $300.

On the other hand, only CompuServe supports 14.4K transmission rates, and then only in selected cities. GEnie's Aladdin is archaic and cumbersome when compared to CompuServe's CIM (CompuServe Information Manager), but it does supports 9600 baud (at increased hourly usage rates); America On-Line has excellent front-end software which runs under Windows and a self-contained GeoWorks kernel (you only need DOS) but is presently stuck at 2400 baud — a hassle if you want to take advantage of the downloading services. The Imagination Network only supports up to 2400 baud as well, but it doesn't seem as big a performance issue since no binary downloading really takes place.

See you on-line, and remember — I might be the guy sitting in that custom Marauder BattleMech aiming a PPC at your head!

Bernie Yee can be reached on AOL as BernardY, GEnie as QUESTBUSTER, and CompuServe at address 75300,3625.

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Product Information Number 221

REPLACE THAT MOTHERBOARD!

It's the Mother of All Boards, and replacing it is easier than you might think.

Neil Randall

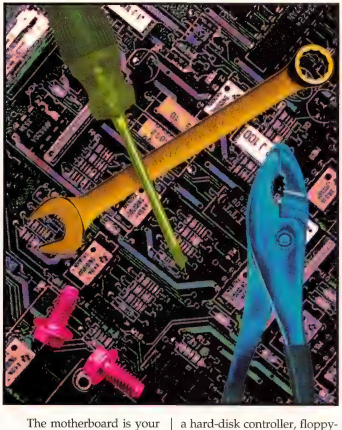
Unless you just recently bought your first PC — and wisely decided that a 486/33 is the right entry-level machine — you're probably anxious to upgrade your computer. If you're still working with a 286, you already know that many new games won't run on it at all. And even if you have a 386DX/25 or better, it may seem that your favorite game publishers think of your machine as old, obsolete technology. Many new games require at least a 386DX/33, and recommend a 486DX/33 or higher!

To say nothing of Windows, of course. With Windows, a 486DX33 is practically essential.

So it's upgrade time again. And you have a choice. You can either go out and buy an entirely new system (which can be an affordable solution these days) or you can take the case off your existing machine and put in a faster, more powerful processor. One option is to simply add a speed-doubling DX2 chip to some boards (depending on the original processor and the design of your system), but if you're moving from a 286 or a 386SX you're almost certain to need an entirely new motherboard.

The Motherboard and Add-on Boards

The first thing you'll have to do is open the case of your computer and determine what you'll need to buy.



The motherboard is your computer's main board. It contains all the circuitry needed to make the computer run, including the main processor and connections to the power supply. All the other boards you put inside the computer are add-on boards (sometimes called cards). These include your video board, sound board, fax board, and CD-ROM controller.

One essential add-on board — if it can really be called that — is the I/O board. I/O stands for input-output, and typically it comes complete with a hard-disk controller, floppy-disk controller, parallel port, serial port(s), and joystick port. Your existing machine may have the controllers and ports built right into the motherboard: if so, you'll need to buy an I/O board along with the new motherboard, unless you can find a motherboard that also has these items built in (generally, they don't).

Some motherboards have video circuitry built right in. If your old one does, you'll have to buy a new video board for your new motherboard. This is a good time to upgrade to that high-resolution Windows accelerator board you've always wanted.

One other consideration is memory. Today's motherboards usually accept SIMMs rather than individual memory chips. SIMMs (Single In-line Memory Modules) are long, rectangular circuit boards that fit easily into the memory banks on the motherboard. For the most part, they're sold in 1-megabyte or (recently) 4-megabyte units. Check your current machine to see if it uses SIMMs. If it does, they can often be removed and placed on the new motherboard.

If you're upgrading from a motherboard with a built-in video system, I/O card, and no SIMMs, you're almost certainly better off buying an entirely new system. For our purposes, let's assume that your current system has a separate video card (which you're happy with), a separate I/O card (which works just fine), and 4-8 megabytes worth of SIMMs.

What You'll Need

1. Screwdrivers: You're almost certain to need a couple Phillips screwdrivers, and you may need a flat-head or Robinson (square) as well. If you use magnetized drivers, which are much more convenient for those hard-to-reach areas, be very, very careful that you don't touch the hard drives or the circuit area of the boards.

2. Masking tape and markers:

As you remove things from the case, label them for later replacement. Also, label their orientation (which side up, for instance).

3. Small container for screws: This little item can save all sorts of headaches. Especially valuable for cat owners.

4. Owner's manual: If you kept the owner's manual for your computer, it should have diagrams of the motherboard with all connectors and jumpers labelled. Keep this at your side; it can be extremely useful, especially if you've forgotten to label something.

4. Time: Give yourself an afternoon or an evening. Yes, it can be done in an hour, but haste makes waste — and this is *your computer* we're talking about wasting.

5. Patience: Something — usually something small and unexpected — will inevitably go wrong. Expect it.

6. TLC: Remember that excellent rule of thumb: if you have to force it, you're doing it wrong. Except for pulling the power cables out of the disk drives (they may be very tight), most items should plug and unplug smoothly and easily.

OUT WITH THE OLD

Before you take another step, a word about static electricity is in order. One static discharge can wipe out an entire board, so be sure to wear a grounded wrist strap as you work!

1. Make a boot disk for your floppy drive A. Put an unformatted floppy in A: and type FORMAT A: /S or put a formatted floppy in A: and type SYS A: Reboot the system with this disk in A: to make sure the computer boots. Note that peripherals such as CD-ROM drives won't start. This is just an emergency diskette.

2. Make another boot disk for A: by following the above procedure. This time, copy your CONFIG.SYS and AUTO EXEC.BAT files to the floppy. Then reboot the system to make sure everything works, including all peripherals.

3. Give yourself lots of room. A big table or desk is fine, or you can move the machine to the floor. If you cramp yourself, you run the risk of losing or confusing items.

4. Put your screwdrivers and screw-case in a handy location.

5. Unplug the power cord from the back of the computer.

6. Unplug all the other cables from the back — monitor cable, phone wires, stereo cords, mouse and keyboard, etc. — labelling them with masking tape. In the case of multi-cable boards such as modems or sound cards, also label where to plug each cable back in.

7. Unscrew and remove all expansion boards from the old motherboard and set them to one side (don't pile them up). With masking tape, label which slot they came from.

8. Remove the cables from the I/O board, labelling and taking careful note where they plug back in. In most cases, it will be obvious (they'll fit in only one place). Also, carefully label which side of the connector faces up. Unscrew and remove the I/O board and set it aside.

9. At the front of the computer, several tiny jumper cables are plugged into the motherboard. These control indicator lights (like your Turbo light) and other items. As you remove each one, label it carefully. Each jumper on the board has an identifying number such as J1, J2, etc. Your label should show which jumper it came from, as well as how it was oriented on that jumper. Example: "J1 yellow" could mean "put this on J1 with yellow towards the back", while "J3 gold right" could mean "put this on J3 with the side with the exposed gold facing to the right edge of the box."

10. If you have to remove the hard drive(s) to allow room to take out the motherboard, unplug the power cords first (they usually have a notched white end), labelling each for where it came from. Then carefully unplug the data cables, once again labelling. One end of the drive cable will go back on the I/O board, so label this clearly, as well as its orientation.

Do it Yourself — Here's How...

Continued on page 58...

11. Usually near the back of the case, you'll see cables that connect the motherboard to the power supply. Remove these very carefully, and clearly label them to make reconnection easier.

12. Remove the memory SIMMs from the old motherboard, being *very* careful not to break the small plastic ends that hold them in place. Study the connecting mechanisms before you start working — there are several different types, and some are designed far better than others. In virtually all designs, you have to release the SIMM from the connection, then tilt it backwards and lift it out. Don't force them!

13. Your motherboard will be held in place with either screws or plastic clips. Remove these and gently lift the motherboard out of the case. While you're in here, do some dusting.

14. Have a coffee and a sandwich, and interface with your loved ones.

IN WITH THE NEW

1. Place the new motherboard in the case, lining the holes in the board with the screw-holes (or the plastic connectors).

2. Affix the motherboard to the case, using either the connectors or the screws.

NOTE: If at any point you drop a screw inside the case, *get it out immediately!* Turn the case upside down until it falls out. Don't even think of powering up a machine that has a loose screw inside it; you might instantly short out something important and expensive.

3. Attach the cables from the power supply to the new motherboard.

4. Insert the I/O board into the appropriate slot — usually the one closest to the power supply.

5. Attach the floppy and hard drive cables (and other cables if you've removed them) to their connections on the I/O board.

NOTE: When plugging in ANY cable, be careful not to bend the pins. If you do bend one, carefully straighten it with a small screwdriver or needle-nose pliers. If you snap it off, the device won't work.

6. Attach the small light and indicator cables (from step 9 above) to the appropriate connectors and jumpers on the new motherboard. Read the documentation for the new motherboard to make sure you have each cable in its proper place.

7. Attach the data and power cables to the floppy and hard drives.

8. NEATNESS NOTE: At this point, you may be utterly disgusted at how unruly the inside of your computer case looks. If it bothers you, straighten things out. Not only will it look better, but a little order will make future upgrades easier.

9. Insert the expansion boards into their appropriate slots. As you insert each one, attach the corresponding cables from the rear of the computer.

10. Screw all expansion boards into place, taking care not to drop screws inside the case.

11. Check for any unattached wires. Attach any you find.

12. Plug in the power cord and turn on the computer.

13. As the computer boots, check the screen for error messages. The most common will probably be a HDD or FDD controller error. In such a case, power down and check the cabling to the floppy and hard drives.

14. Boot again. This time, check that all indicator lights work properly. If not, experiment with the orientation of the small cables until they all work as they should.

15. Once your system is up and running, ensure that the CD-ROM, modem, and all other peripherals work properly. Next, spend a few minutes marvelling at your newfound speed.

16. Replace the cover of your computer and clean up your work area. Then, go watch Sports Center, have a cup of tea, and think of how impressive you'll suddenly be at social gatherings.

Continued from page 57

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 2nd Edition

FORGOTTEN REALMS

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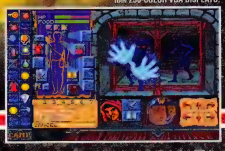
Product Information Number 113

IBM 256-COLOR VGA DISPLAYS.



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PRIVATEER

Category: Space-combat and commerce simulation

Developer: Origin

Publisher: Origin, 12940 Research Blvd., Austin TX 78750

Rating:

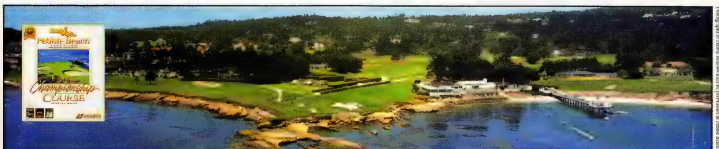
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/33MHz	486DX/25MHz
4 MB RAM	Video card with 1 MB memory
DOS 5.0 or higher	Disk-caching utility
20MB hard-drive space	Supported sound card (preferably one with DAC)
VGA	Joystick

You've just set down on the landing pad, hull armor still hot from a combination of prolonged afterburner use, tractor beam stress, and no small amount of enemy fire taken on your approach to the automatic landing zone. "Damn," you swear softly as you inspect the damage your ship's taken: One Tachyon Cannon is totalled, and if the missile launcher hadn't been empty when it took that last hit, you wouldn't even be standing here pissed off about your diminishing profit margins.

Well, at least your cargo is intact. Hopefully, prices will be high enough that this run won't be a total bust. If you don't start turning a profit soon you'll end up as just another pad-rat hanging around the spaceport bar, boring everyone with tearful tales of the Good Old Days when you actually owned a ship instead of just unloading them.

Welcome to the world of *Privateer*, set in a gritty side of the *Wing Commander* universe where

SCOTT WOLF



Pebble Beach golf course courtesy of Pebble Beach Company. Photographer: Charles Mauzy/Mauzy Photography. ©1991

From the Beaches to the Mountains...

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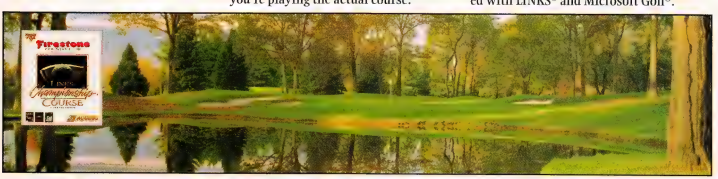
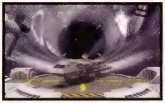
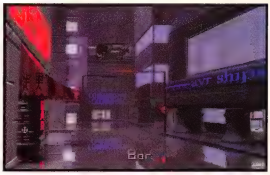


Finance is as important as Firepower. Unlike the *Wing Commander* games, in which you basically followed orders as the plot unfolded around you, *Privateer* has a much looser structure, one that *WC* vets will find refreshing. In *Wing Commander*, you had no choice over the craft you piloted; *Privateer* allows you to choose from four different ship designs and to customize them almost any way you like—provided you have the cash. With over a dozen weapons, five engines, five shield generators, nine targeting systems, and a list of options that would choke Rush Limbaugh, the combinations are endless.

All these choices give *Privateer* a very personal feel that at first pulls you in gently, then holds you with an iron grip. If you like, you can ignore the plot completely and simply concentrate on carving out a career as a trader or bounty hunter for as long as you like. In many ways, *Privateer* functions like a glorious, supercharged update of *Elite*, the touchstone of space-trading and combat simulations, and it should be interesting to see how *Privateer* stacks up against *Frontier*, Gametek's upcoming sequel to *Elite*.



You begin with a humble Tarsus class scout ship, a gift from your dying grandfather, and you'll quickly learn that one of the fundamental laws of the *Privateer* universe is that Poverty equals Death. It may not be politically correct, but it's the cold hard truth, and you'll need to make quite a bit of money before the plot will get anywhere near you.



Taking on missions is a simple matter of accessing the ATM-style mission computers found in every port, and that's a good thing—you're going to need to earn cash quickly for a better ship and lots of lovely weapons in order to survive what's in store. The Merchant and Mercenary Guilds offer the choicest missions and guarantee better pay, provided you don't get killed trying to complete them. Fortunately, there's no penalty for incomplete missions other than not getting paid.

Ship dealers at selected outposts offer the Galaxy, a huge merchant ship that will remind you of the *Nostromo* from the first *Alien* movie; the Orion, a well-armored gunship; and the Centurion, a sleek and capable Heavy Fighter.

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Here again, Origin has done a great job of making the game personal: "salespeak" in 2669 sounds surprisingly the same as it did in the late 20th century. Once you've found the ship ideally suited for your personality — be it cautious trader, vicious pirate, or a combination of the two — you're ready to earn the big bucks.

Eventually you'll find yourself in New Detroit, a rainy city that could almost double for the bleak Los Angeles of *Blade Runner*, where the first in a series of fixers will offer you a mission (Knock-knock. Who's there? The Plot!). You'll get bounced across the entire sector, doing a variety of odd jobs and making astonishing discoveries, as the intriguing story unfolds at it's own leisurely pace. Fail at any of these missions, though, and you can kiss the plot goodbye, so be sure to save your game before each one.

The Gemini Sector is home to some faces familiar to *Wing Commander* fans; the Confederation is here, as are the Kilrathi, but it's also bristling with new ships and enemies: you *will* run into pirates, Militia (the Confederation's interstellar police), fanatical religious Retros, and privateers like yourself. There's a sort of karma factor at work in *Privateer*: Keeping your nose clean and wasting pirates will earn you a favorable nod from the Confederacy and Militia, while defying the authorities can result in cavalry-like support from your pirate pals. The Retros, however, are just plain nuts, and nobody much cares if you splatter their guts all over the nearest moon.

Curiously, the sector is also home to a race of thick-necked human clones; you'll find the same Guildmasters, bartenders, and pilots everywhere you go. Of course, this sort of familiarity is kind of comforting, in a spooky way.

A handy new interface, the pilot's Personal Computer, allows instant access to mission and financial status, cargo manifests, and disk options, but screams out for a display of what you paid for the items in your hold. The navigation screens could stand some improvement, too, since it's only possible to display one quadrant of the sector at a time. (You have to buy each quadrant map separately, but even springing for the full set doesn't let you view them as a whole.)

Outfitting your ship is quick and easy, and you can literally see the modifications being made to your ship as equipment is added or removed. Some

familiar equipment, like the trusty ITTS (Inertial Targeting and Tracking System) from *Wing Commander II*, has been vastly improved, particularly in the top-of-the-line B&S Omni scanner unit; not only is it color-coded, but it also compensates for the velocity of different weapons.

While the option to pick and choose your ship's equipment makes some tasks easier, it also raises new challenges. In the Wing Commander series, it was standard operating procedure to land with a severely mangled ship, get a snappy salute and "Welcome back" from your chief mechanic, then hit the lounge as your crew set about the task of repairing the damage. But in *Privateer*, you'll find out just how much fixing those fancy guns costs when the Confederation isn't footing the bill. Consequently, a Repair Droid is an essential investment, despite the fact that it goes on strike as soon as you hit the autopilot or land at a spaceport. I guess it figures if you ain't workin', it ain't workin'.

And your shields operate on the same aggravating principle. After a particularly nasty engagement, your shields may need a lot of time to soak up energy and regain full strength. Steer manually to the next nav point (or simply "park it" for a while before activating the autopilot) and you'll arrive repaired, recharged, and ready for trouble should it await you there. If you use the autopilot, however, you'll arrive with your ship in the same damaged condition. Apparently the autopilot can somehow "fold space" and arrive without actually having expended any time in making the trip.

The animation during combat sequences isn't as silky-smooth as in *X-Wing*, but the hyperspace jump sequence puts *X-Wing*'s to shame. And while the optional Speech Pack only provides speech for in-flight radio transmissions, it's always nice to hear another voice, human or not, this far from home. Graphics throughout are outstanding, thanks to a makeover at the *Strike Commander* Cosmetic Boutique, and bases like New Constantinople, Oxford, and Perry Naval are quite simply breathtaking. Even the more spartan facilities have a unique depth and lived-in quality.

Privateer is a solid and entertaining game that does an excellent job of fleshing out the sometimes one-dimensional Wing Commander universe. Tied together with a moody musical score and brilliant sound effects, *Privateer* creates a very real sense of being Out There, all on your own in a universe full of endless possibilities.

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Product Information Number 221

DARK SUN: SHATTERED LANDS

Category: Fantasy role-playing

Developer: SSI

Publisher: SSI 675 Almanor Avenue Suite 201 Sunnyvale, California 94086

Rating:

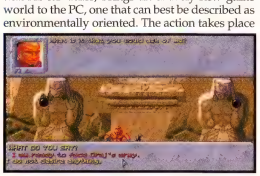
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz	486DX/33MHz
2 MB RAM	4 MB RAM
17 MB hard-drive space	AdLib, General MIDI, Pro Audio Spectrum, Roland, or Sound Blaster
VGA	Mouse
Mouse	

BERNIE YEE

Fans of computer fantasy role-playing have been eagerly awaiting this AD&D title ever since it was first shown at the 1992 Summer CES, mainly because it would debut both a new AD&D game world *and* a new gaming system. SSI has held the AD&D license ever since the release of *Pools of Radiance*, but the gaming system the company had created for its Gold Box AD&D games (so dubbed because of the gold trim around the packaging) was creaky and far past its prime. SSI did come up with a highly acclaimed engine for the AD&D game *Eye of the Beholder*, but that was over two years ago, and the final game in that series was sadly stale and uninspiring.

Slated for release a fall '92 release, *Dark Sun: Shattered Lands* became mired in a series of delays so severe that many industry insiders blamed SSI's recent financial troubles on the loss of projected revenue from the game. But *Dark Sun* has finally made it to store shelves, and both AD&D fans and SSI can breathe a collective sigh of relief. Now comes the big question — is *Dark Sun* a giant step forward for computer-based AD&D? The answer, as is usually the case for questions like this, is yes and no.

Dark Sun: Shattered Lands, based on 2nd edition AD&D rules, brings an entirely new game world to the PC, one that can best be described as environmentally oriented. The action takes place



on Athas, a world in ecological decline due to the irresponsible use of magic: Certain magic-users learned that they could gain greater powers by sucking the life force from the biosphere, and their single-minded lust to gain supremacy led to the eventual disruption of the entire ecosphere.

Now the surface of Athas is covered by vast expanses of deserts, broken only by the presence of intermittent city-states ruled by these "defiler" sorcerer-kings. Standing in opposition to these tyrants is the "Veiled Alliance," a revolutionary group founded to promote environmentally sound magic-use and topple the totalitarian defilers from power.

Even though the concept sounds politically correct almost to the point of aggravation, Dark Sun is one of the most popular game worlds created by TSR (publisher of the pen-and-paper AD&D games), and *Shattered Lands* incorporates many of the elements that made TSR's line so successful. New character classes like gladiators and psionicists, and new races like the dwarven mul and thry-kreen, supplement AD&D regulars thieves, rangers, elves, and dwarves. Survival in the Dark Sun universe is tougher than in earlier AD&D worlds like Dragonlance and Forgotten Realms, so character statistics like strength and intelligence are routinely above the traditional 18 maximum of the Gold Box games.

Shattered Lands resembles *Ultima VII* in many ways —particularly in its full-screen, overhead perspective — but *Shattered Lands* eschews some of *Ultima VII*'s attention to minutiae in favor of more straightforward and fast-paced game play. The flexible game system offers automapping (a complete overhead view of the region in which you're located is always available, so a more comprehensive mapping system is still needed), objects which can be dropped and later retrieved, lots of NPC interaction, and handsome graphics. The mouse pointer can be changed into several icons in order to examine, talk, attack, and launch ranged weapons (arrows, darts, spears, rocks, slings, and so on); similarly, objects can be picked up, opened, used, read, and otherwise manipulated.

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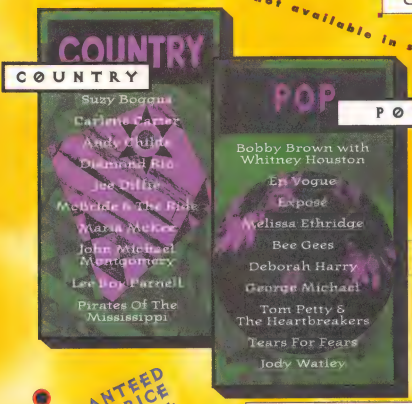

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Your party of four begins the game as gladiators in the arena in the city-state of Draj, fighting for the perverse pleasure of the ruler, and your very first concern is to discover one of several ways to escape. Once you manage a breakout, the game follows your party as they head into the desert and become renegade freedom fighters, attempting to unify small villages scattered throughout the desert against a military operation designed to wipe out the settlements that exist outside the walls of the city-state.

In order to gain confidences and forge alliances, your characters must undertake a number of quests, which can be attempted in any order. Although the plot is somewhat linear in that your actions are directed to a single specific end, there's also an open-ended feel to the game, thanks to multiple options in solving certain problems, as well as several unrelated side-quests.

Unlike some other fantasy role-playing games, *Shattered Lands* does not become a magic item give-away show, either; things like life-stealing swords and fireball necklaces are few, rare, and prized, as they should be. And SSI opted for moderation when it came to the question of "How much combat is enough?"; there seems to be less

combat than in earlier AD&D titles, but there's enough to keep hack 'n' slash enthusiasts happy, and an adjustable difficulty to give less-experienced players a better chance of success. The final combat scene is a typically grand affair, pitting your characters and a reunion of new allies against a veritable horde of monsters and evil humans.

Since combat is a turn-based affair using the overhead perspective found in the rest of the game, tactics can and do play an important role — using your mul gladiator (an awesome fighter) to soften up opponents while your spellcasters hang back and provide artillery support is just as effective as it should be.

At the completion of the game, it's possible to still have several side-quests unfinished. You're free to continue to search for other side-quests even after victory, though I opted to wait for the next installment in the series. As usual, SSI plans to allow gamers to import their *Shattered Lands* characters into the next adventure, something that more designers should emulate.

There are several design choices, however, that seem more like curious oversights, where aspects of game play more or less fell through the cracks. For example, your party can only rest at designated campsites, but these are often few and far between. Though money can be accumulated throughout your quests, it has little practical value. Certain character classes — especially fire clerics — are very weak and have very limited spells, so it makes little sense to choose one for your party. Puzzles are relatively limited, and conversation is a bit more sparse than in the excellently written *Riftwar: Betrayal at Krondor*.

But perhaps the most troubling thing about *Shattered Lands* was the number of bugs in the original release. Now, there's hardly a game released that doesn't have some bug, however small. But in addition to "minor" problems such as disappearing objects and missing inventory items, the original release version of *Shattered Lands* also had bugs that prevented further progress, and sometimes even kicked me out to the DOS prompt.

To SSI's credit, these problems aren't going unnoticed. After I reported a serious, fatal bug, a patch to correct the problem was available on CompuServe within 24 hours. Several patches are already available — including one for corrected WaveBlaster support — but be sure you install them *before* you begin playing, because the bug could be in the saved-game file.

SSI hopes that this new game system will last a long time in the fast-moving world of computer FRPs, and chances are that the engine will remain largely unchanged for the next title set in the Dark Sun universe. There are definitely some elements of the system could stand improvement, but SSI earned a solid reputation continually enhancing its Gold Box with each new release.

Despite its problems, there's no question that *Shattered Lands* was more enjoyable than even SSI's hugely popular *Eye of the Beholder* series; indeed, *Shattered Lands* is a much-needed shot-in-the arm for SSI's flagging AD&D license. And it may be the best fantasy role-playing game they've come out with since *Pool of Radiance*, their very first Gold Box game.

THE BLUE AND THE GRAY

Category: War Game

Developer: Impressions

Publisher: Impressions Software, 222 Third Street Suite 0234, Cambridge MA 02142

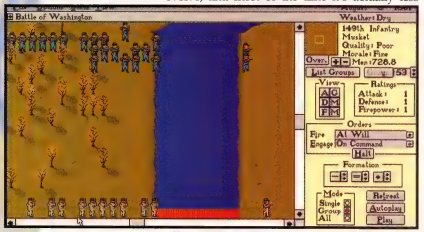
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 or faster, 640K RAM 2.5 MB hard-drive space DOS 3.0 or higher VGA Mouse	386SX/16 MHz or faster AdLib, AdLib Gold, Aria, Gravis Ultrasound, Roland, Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

For the past 18 months or so, Impressions has been striving mightily to perfect its Micro Miniatures wargame system. This system does away with the conventional unit icons — rectangular markers with an X for infantry, a slash for cavalry, an oval for artillery, and so forth — and replaces them with individually modeled and animated soldiers who maneuver and fight according to commands issued by the player.

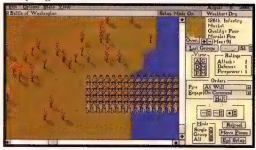
In *theory*, the Micro Miniatures system is a great idea; in practice, however, it's been slow to evolve, and most of the time it's actually less



effective than simply *imagining* the action taking place as you manipulate garden-variety icons. The first Micro Miniatures game I reviewed, *Fighting for Rome*, was a great disappointment: You never saw archers fire their arrows (you merely heard a twanging noise to indicate that they were attacking), and the swordsmen looked more like they were dancing with each other than engaged in bloody hacking and slashing.

These quirks were largely eliminated in *Conquest of Japan*, the next title to use Micro Miniatures, and the result was a solid game. One reason for the improved playability of *COJ* was that it blended strategic maneuvers with tactical engagements (the first generation of Micro Miniatures games were strictly tactical in scope), but mainly the improvement came down to the fact that the animated battles looked a bit more like...well, like *battles*.

In its latest incarnation, *The Blue and the Gray*, the Micro Miniatures system — while still nowhere near as impressive as designer Edward Grabowski wants it to be — actually works quite well. What's more, the system is embedded within a campaign game that's nothing less than superb. Grabowski and company have succeeded where several other ambitious developers have failed: They have created a smooth, attractive, eminently playable game that accurately simulates the vast strategic sweep of the Civil War, yet which effortlessly segues into individual battles when the two



opposing armies come into contact.

Using an interface design that is a model of clarity and elegance, you're able to recruit and train new units, conduct long-range deployment by rail and sea transports, fortify vulnerable cities, "stack" units in a way that realistically simulates Robert E. Lee's bold employment of the principle of concentration-of-force, reinforce depleted units or create new ones where they are needed, and easily organize divisions into corps or vice-versa.

All of this takes place on a handsome map that covers everything from eastern Texas to Cape Hatteras; the rail lines and rivers are all in the correct locations, and the scale of movement — whether by foot, by horse, by train, or by one of Stonewall Jackson's famous "forced marches" — is dead-on in its accuracy.

You can play the game entirely as a strategic simulation, allowing the computer to automatically calculate battle results, which it does with a high degree of plausibility; if you're a stickler for realism — or a masochist — you can even cut on the Fog of War and Supply options. Fog of War

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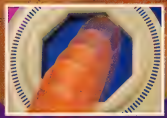

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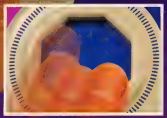

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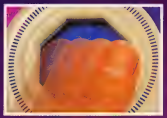

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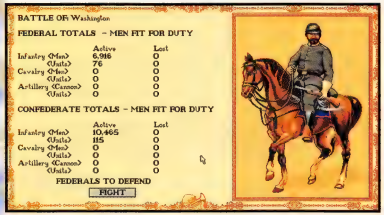
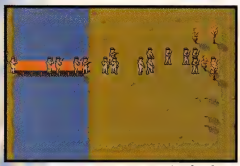
prevents your seeing enemy troops until your men could actually see them across the battlefield, and varies according to weather.

While the campaign mode plays beautifully, the Micro Miniatures battles are the heart and soul



of the game, and I found them much more impressive than in any previous Micro Miniatures game I've tried. Up to 200 animated figures can appear in any battle — each one, of course, representing 100 or more flesh-and-blood soldiers — and their dense masses, rendered in crisp, colorful detail, really do suggest the realities of a Civil War engagement.

Your command options accurately reflect the late-Napoleonic tactics of the period: line and column formations, double lines for defense, loose formations for skirmishing or covering large area of terrain, squares for defending against cavalry assaults. Terrain and morale factors also seem-ed quite realistic in the effect they have on the outcome of each battle.



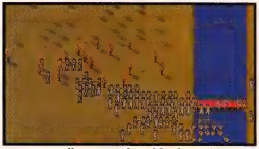
Graphic and aural realism has also been improved over previous Impressions efforts: Rifles and cannon puff smoke, artillery targets become cratered, and destroyed units turn into bodies, to name a few examples. Suitable sound effects during battle, as well as period music during interludes, help strengthen the mood.

While I found the command and control aspects to be very convincing and true to the era, there's definitely room for improvement. Terrain features are merely sketched, and look crude compared to the detailed soldiers. The manual promises you'll be able to see the soldiers "hitting and flailing at each other," but very little of that is actually discern-able. During melee fights and even cavalry charges, the animated figures just sort of mill around until one side or the other begins to retreat.

For gamers who enjoy the Micro Miniatures system but don't have the time or inclination to fight out every skirmish in detail, there's a Quickfight mode that sets up the battle for you and hurls the opposing forces at each other from close range.

The most annoying weakness — and a puzzling one, considering the otherwise excellent documentation — is that the terms of victory set by the program aren't very well defined. The manual states that victory is achieved when you whittle your enemy's forces down to 50 percent of their original strength. But too often the battle ends long before this goal has been reached. If this is supposed to simulate a rout, desertion due to low morale, or some other factor, it's never mentioned.

There are a couple of other boo-boos as well. Cavalry armed with sabres, for instance, is seemingly much more powerful than cavalry armed with carbines. Real sabre-charges were rare during the Civil War and seldom very effective; most cavalry engagements were fought on foot, with rifles. And the manual's suggested Confederate



strategy — all-out assault on Northern cities — is suicidal, and totally ignores the possibility of a defensive Confederate victory, either through foreign intervention or the vagaries of Yankee politics.

I don't mean to pick nits. While *The Blue and the Gray* may have its idiosyncracies, overall it is a formidably impressive product. In particular, the documentation deserves a special salute — it is perhaps the clearest and best organized I have ever encountered for a game of such complexity. It comes in three sections: A basic tutorial which enables even the least-experienced gamer to make sense quickly of what's on the screen; and two detailed, expansive manuals covering both campaign and Micro Miniature modes that tell you not only *how* things work, but *why* they work the way they do.

The game also comes with a 180-page *History of the American Civil War*, by Mark Saunders. I sampled several chapters of this and found it to be

BATTLE HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR
August 8 1861
DATE BATTLE ATTACKER VICTOR
7.18.1861 Washington Confederate Federal
7.20.1861 Charlotte Federal Confederate
7.25.1861 Fredericksburg Confederate Confederate
7.25.1861 Fredericksburg Confederate Confederate
8.1.1861 Charlotte Confederate Confederate
8.2.1861 Fredericksburg Confederate Confederate
8.5.1861 Washington Federal Confederate
8.8.1861 Fredericksburg Federal Federal
LOSSES DUE TO DISEASE: (FED:) 5,070 (CONF:) 8,467
LOSSES BY BATTLE
BY BATTLE
BY DISEASE

reliable and very lively in style — a good piece of work in its own right, and a genuine bonus for the consumer.

The Blue and the Gray will soon be facing some tough competition, including a Civil War game by Sid Meir and *Drums of Glory* from war-game giant Three-Sixty, but as of this writing, *The Blue and the Gray* is the best Civil War simulation on the market. Unlike *No Greater Glory*, it does not choke to death on political minutiae, and unlike *From Sumter to Appomattox*, it is wonderfully playable. Impressions, I *am* impressed.

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Product Information Number 113

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MASTER OF ORION

Category: Sci-Fi Strategy

Developer: MicroProse

Publisher: MicroProse, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley MD 21030

Rating:

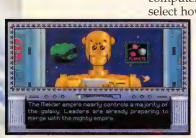
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz	386DX/25 MHz
12 MB hard-drive space	4 MB RAM
2 MB RAM	DOS 5 or higher
DOS 3.3 or higher	Supported sound cards
VGA	Mouse

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Certain art forms derive their vitality from the strictness and severity of their parameters: the concerto, for instance, or the sonnet. Or conquer-the-galaxy computer games. The results are judged, by their intended audiences, not so much for any permutations of the basic forms, but by the elegance, creativity, and embellishment that is packed *inside* the accepted "rules" of that form. If those parameters are exceeded rather than manipulated, you may have something very beautiful on its own terms, but it is no loner a "sonnet," a "concerto," or a C.T.G. game. It's "something else", and must be judged on that basis.

Master of Orion is the newest contender in the C.T.G. category, and in all the ways that matter to this genre's legion of addicts, it is a masterpiece. *Master of Orion* embodies a nearly perfect blend of classic ingredients, exquisitely balanced and seamlessly wedded to an interface so clear and so logical that veteran players will be able to quench their thirst for intergalactic conquest with scarcely a glance at the manual.

Predictably, you begin with a single undeveloped planet and try to bootstrap yourself into economic, technological, and strategic power on the grandest scale. But even in this most basic formal requirement, *Orion* manages to offer a refreshing and intriguing slant. You play against computerized opponents only, but are able to select how many (up to five); more importantly, you also determine the size of the galaxy —small, medium, large, or huge— where you'll vie for domination.


The Alkalai empire nearly controls a majority of the galaxy. Leaders are already preparing to merge with the mighty empire.

A small universe (24 stars) means you'll be bumping into aliens and complex diplomatic or military situations long before your economy is stable or your technology very advanced. Of course, this in itself presents a challenge —virtually a whole different game, judging from the one time I tried it — but it can be quite frustrating if you're not *very* familiar with how the game operates.

On the other hand, choosing a huge universe — 108 star systems — commits you to an enormous and relatively slow-moving campaign, as well as resource-management problems that almost require a separate computer program to track.

So it's best to start with a medium universe (48 stars). These are randomly generated in terms of resource distribution, but they provide enough "elbow room" for most species to achieve a fair degree of technological progress before they start encountering each other.

After choosing the size of the universe, you must select the species you want to belong to. There are nine in addition to *homo sapiens*, and you get a significantly different — sometimes *radically* different — gaming experience with each one. Each species can eventually develop tremendous resources and powers, but because each starts out with a pronounced advantage in *one* area, the evolutionary process tends to be delightfully unique.

I found this one of *Orion*'s most engaging features. After playing two or three centuries' worth of game-time as, say, a silicoid life form that can survive on planets no other species would even bother visiting, you actually begin *thinking* in alien, non-human ways.

If the idea of being a sentient rock doesn't turn you on, play as the emperor of the reptilian Sakkra, whose chief advantage is that they breed like fruit flies and can overwhelm smarter, more advanced civilizations by sheer weight of numbers. Humans fall in the middle of the evolutionary spectrum, and tend to have considerable diplomacy and trading skills. The inventory of species has been carefully thought-out and, like every other aspect of this game, balanced to near-perfection.

Resource management is of course one of the classic ingredients of this type of game, and *Orion* really shines in this department, too. Planetary production is measured in BC units (billions of credits), and it expands as population and industry expand. Naturally, some of those credits will be used to fund routine maintenance and overhead, but the rest must be invested in five basic categories: spaceship construction, planetary defenses, industrial growth, waste management, and pure research. Easy-to-understand sliding-scale bars are used to set priorities, and there are some fairly subtle trade-offs you can make if your situation suddenly changes: You may force your industrial growth in a Stalinist manner, for example, but you'll pay a penalty in terms of pollution.

As pleasing as it might be to have an ideally balanced ecology *and* a growing economy, there are times when you may find it *worthwhile* to be wildly unbalanced. The most extreme case I've yet

encountered is the periodic need to divert nearly all your resources into a counter-espionage sweep to clean out all the spies and saboteurs planted by your rivals. This puts an extreme drain on your coffers, resulting in a virtual halt in all other activities; but if you time it properly, it can literally save you from disaster.

Research investment is fine-tuned on the Technology Screen, again by means of ratio bars. Generally speaking, it's best to have a balanced research program rather than try to force a single category; there is definitely a synergistic relationship between breakthrough in one field and those in others. During the early stages of any game, however, I would suggest weighting your research investment heavily toward propulsion technology. Planets suitable for colonization are few and far between, and those extra parsecs of range can really help you get established.

A related suggestion: a small empire of two or three robust, healthy colonies, is better, in the long run, than a sprawling empire of stunted, underpopulated ones. Sooner or later, your terraforming and ecological technology will advance to the stage where it becomes profitable to colonize marginally habitable, hostile, or even dead planets (the latter are often exceptionally rich in mineral wealth and wars may erupt over their possession).

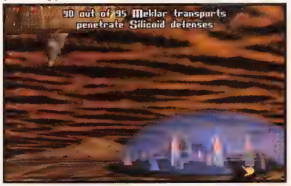
Each race may deploy only six types of starships at any given time. When your research efforts yield a new technology, you must decide when to scrap an existing class of ship — then spend a *lot* of time on the "ship design" screen deciding what new class you want to invest in. Until miniaturization technology becomes available — fairly deep into the game — you'll have to do some fancy trade-offs between firepower, defensive features, and maneuverability.

Space combat is depicted in a manner similar to the battles in Interstel's *Armada 2525*, although the graphics and sound effects are light-years better. At some point during your technological evolution, troop transports become available and you can mount interstellar invasions. Capturing an enemy planet is usually a very profitable venture — you immediate acquire all the surviving factories and resources, along with whatever technology the defeated opponent may have developed.

And where, you may ask, does "Orion" come in? Orion was the legendary world of an unthinkably ancient Master Race who once controlled the galaxy. The now-uninhabited planet is home to secrets of great power and astounding technology, but is protected by the Guardian, a computer-controlled ship with mind-boggling firepower and defensive systems. The race that finds Orion and manages to hang on to it will become Masters of the Universe.

Alternatively, through power, guile, and canny alliance-making, you can be *elected* to that post if two-thirds of the "High Council" (a kind of interstellar tribunal that forms when half of the galaxy has been explored) vote you in. You can get there by brute force, or by Machiavellian diplomacy; the choice is yours.

One word of advice: *take your time*. Colony ships require titanic diversions of money and resources in the early centuries of game play: Building one may tie up your shipyards for 60 or even 75 years. Since the time-scale of the game is so vast, there's not much inherent advantage to be gained by playing as though this were a horse race.



Master of Orion adheres to the rules of its genre, but it smoothly synthesizes the very best features of its many predecessors into a game of tremendous depth and addictive playability. At a time when storage space on my hard drive is becoming increasingly precious, it's a real tribute to say that *Orion* will be there for a long time to come.

QUARTER POLE

Category: Sports Simulation

Developer: MicroLeague

Publisher: MicroLeague, 2201 Drummond Plaza, Newark, DE 19711-5711

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz	386DX/25 MHz
640K RAM	Disk-caching utility
14 MB hard-drive space	
VGA	

And they're off! This unique product gives horse-racing enthusiasts a chance to live out their dreams, from heading out to the track to parlay a bankroll into a life on easy street or managing a stable of thoroughbreds.

LEE BUCHANAN

You choose from several career scenarios that allow you either to manage horses or to concentrate on betting. You can take on the role of a blue-collar joe trying to turn his weekly paycheck into a fortune, or play as a spoiled rich kid who's inherited his uncle's stable of thoroughbreds.

Whichever mode you choose, however, *Quarter Pole* requires you to know your business. To have a good day at the track, you must do your homework, studying race histories, jockeys, the program book, tip sheets, and the weather.

And that's not easy for newcomers, at least not at first. Horses have different strengths at different race lengths -- the pony that won you a bundle at seven furlongs might fade to last place in nine furlongs. But *Quarter Pole* provides all the information you need to make the decisions. You have access to the history of every horse, trainer, and jockey, and can review results for every race run on the track since your career began.

MicroLeague has also made it easy to move around Blue Rock Downs. You can enter the tip booth to pick up a tip sheet, visit the stables to check on your horses, go to the lounge to check the track data base, visit the track president, lay down your money at the betting window, and then take your place in the grandstand to watch the action.

Betting procedures are accurate, with wagers available to win, place, or show. And if you're feeling really hot, you can plop down an exacta or trifecta bet for an exact order of finish.

Managing your stable of horses is equally tricky, especially when choosing what races to enter. Enter your budding star in a claiming race, and you might be forced to sell him. Luckily, your trainer will manage your stable until you learn the ropes.

The entire year's race schedule is set when you start the game -- 10 races a day, Wednesday through Monday every week. Several types of races are included -- maiden, claiming, allowance, stakes, and handicap.

Quarter Pole handles the career aspect of the horse biz quite well: horses age, get injured, and are retired. But once a year, you can test your knowledge of horse flesh, bidding on untested 2-year-olds in the auction tent. There you might buy the next Seattle Slew at a bargain -- or invest your life savings in the next Mr. Ed.

The graphics are acceptable but not outstanding. Strangely enough, the weakest graphics are those you see during a race; you're limited to a static perspective that doesn't provide close-ups and doesn't give you a feeling of the progression of the race. The front stretch looks the same as the turns.

But while I'm able to live with the graphics, the almost complete lack of sound effects is a mystery. There are little tidbits of sound scattered throughout the game — click on the water cooler in the jockeys' lounge, for example, and you'll hear water gurgling — but during the race itself, there's complete silence: no thundering hoofbeats, no cheering, nothing.

On top of that, it takes a *very* long time — around 5 minutes on my 486/33 with 8 megs of RAM — to load a new scenario, or start a new day of races. I realize there are a lot of numbers to crunch here, but it's still an annoying delay.

Quarter Pole is a solid horse-racing simulation, but it suffers from a decided lack of élan. Let's face it: Horse racing isn't the most thrilling subject for a computer game, so you'd think the authors would have packed lots of bells and whistles into the game. They didn't, so what you're left with is a rather dry simulation.

Polygonal
rotoscoped
fractally
Gourard-shaded
full motion
delta frame
edutainment
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Product Information Number 182

RETURN TO ZORK

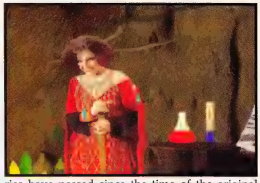
Category: Adventure

Developer: Activision

Publisher: Activision, 11440 San Vincente Blvd., Losa ANgeles CA 90049

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/25 MHz 4 MB RAM, 600K free DOS 5 or higher VGA Mouse Sound card	386DX/33 or faster Double speed CD-ROM CD-ROM cache Roland MT, Sound Blaster or compatible sound card



The first Zork adventures, as any old-time computer gamer will tell you, were text games. And that means text *only* — no graphics, no sound, no nothing. Just descriptions of a scene, details on what objects were in that scene and where the exits were, and then a blinking cursor for your typed input: "Go North. Pick Up Rock."

MATTHEW A. FIRME

Despite the lack of graphics and sound — or, perhaps, because of it — Infocom's Zork games attracted a wildly enthusiastic following. At the time, the Zork titles were of unparalleled depth and complexity, and in many ways they forged the way for all adventure games to come. The series invited us to invent our own game world, personalizing the Great Underground Empire of Zork as we imagined it for ourselves. Playing a Zork game was like interacting with a good novel; a unique experience, and one guaranteed to inspire loyalty.

But the personal computer is quantum leaps ahead of it where it was in the heyday of *Zork*. Graphic adventures — not text adventures — are the norm, and today's game players *expect* all the graphic and sonic enhancements they can get. In creating *Return to Zork*, Activision had to consider the contemporary gamer's craving for top-notch effects, while weighing the text-only beginnings that allowed very involved and absorbing puzzles — the kind that inspired such a loyal following. And the result is even better than this Zorkaholic might have hoped.

The brand new *Return to Zork* not only revives a classic adventure cycle, but catapults it into the future of interactive entertainment. In appearance and interface, *Return* is way beyond just about any CD-ROM game on the market — as befits a once-and-future trendsetter. The technological leap is dealt with in the game's storyline as well. Centuries have passed since the time of the original games, and what we see is a modern Zork. This tack works well, creating a sense of the original Zork games as history, and this high-tech new title as state-of-the-art.

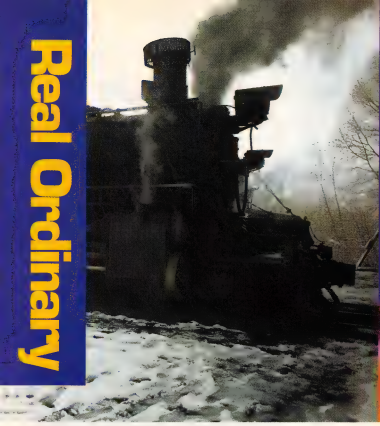
It's the look of *Return to Zork*, and the sheer professionalism of its presentation, that will command your admiration each time you sit down to play. Utilizing digitized video and audio of professional actors in nearly every role, *Return* is as exciting as any movie. And it's interactive to boot. You are the star here, and you'll live this game in true first-person fashion — through *your* eyes and ears.

Ears, because not a single written line of dialogue appears in this game. When you talk with anyone, or when you're told important information, it's entirely through digitized speech. To help you remember what's said, a tape recorder in your inventory automatically records all dialogue. It's a wonderful extension of the first-person perspective, and it works beautifully.

One reason it works so well is that the game's designers spent the time (and money) to hire professional actors. Ever since the first digitized characters appeared in computer games, I've been of the opinion that the technical marvel of seeing those real people just isn't enough to hold a gamer's interest. Because once a game presents real performers, those performances beg to be compared to the acting we see everyday on television and in movies. Too often game developers have tried to get away with sub-standard performers — and the results are sometimes comical, sometimes sad. Activision avoids this by using pros. The performances are all solid, adding to the adventure rather than detracting from it.

Return to Zork is available on floppy disk as well as on CD-ROM, and a new CD-ROM version has recently started shipping with Sigma Designs' ReelMagic video board. This board brings incredible full-motion to the game for realism you have to see to believe.

Until now, the much-heralded "interactive movie" has seemed to be just so much hype. But *Return to Zork* brings the hype to life. This is truly an amazing, next-generation product, of such quality and technical excellence that it *must* become the model for CD-ROM adventure-game designers.



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Product Information Number 142

SHADOWCASTER

Category: Action/Adventure

Developer: Ravensoft

Publisher: Origin, P.O. Box 161750, Austin, TX 78716

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/33	486SX/25
4 MB RAM	Sound Blaster or compatible
16 MB Hard-drive space	Sound Card
DOS 5 or higher	
VGA, Mouse	

TRENT C. WARD

Shadowcaster from Origin is the end product of several different development teams' work. Its easily recognizable interface is from Id software's *Wolfenstein 3-D*, one of the most popular titles of 1992. Ravensoft, the game's developer, is responsible for the fantastic art work and basic design of the game. And then Ravensoft took the title to Electronic Arts, where some of the high-level routines were tweaked. EA passed the game along to Origin, who added special effects and some additional sound. And as a few minutes with the finished product will tell you, all of the time and extra effort were well worth it.

Shadowcaster's story is as unique as its origins. You play as Kirt, a young shapeshifter. Though you begin the game without the ability to morph into other forms, before the first level is up you'll gain access to the Maorin, one of the most powerful of your forms. During the course of the game you'll learn to shift into a total of six different creatures, each with its own phenomenal abilities and powers. Using these forms, you'll travel from an outdoor garden into a mysterious temple filled with twisting tunnels and confusing teleports. Your mission is to repair six mystical obelisks and defeat the leader of the evil shapeshifters, Veste. The use of different viewpoints for each of your forms, and the detailed graphics of the corridors, really help bring it all to life.

A beautiful game from start to finish, *Shadowcaster*'s graphics are top notch. The walls of the corridors you roam range from classic stonework to strange, pulsating cell walls. Added visual effects, like strange statues and monuments, add to the eerie quality of the game, and you can almost feel the heat as rivers of lava rush by. The monsters are intriguing and often bizarre, and some of them, such as the lava monsters, are just plain fun to watch. The morphing routines are really spectacular, and the animation stays smooth throughout the sequence.

As in *Wolfenstein 3-D*, *Shadowcaster*'s graphics do get pretty grainy as you move toward objects. But this is a by-product of the graphic process that provides the game's remarkable

3-D feel. The graininess is never overwhelming and the feeling of motion you come away with will have you seeing dark, twisting corridors in your sleep.

You see through the eyes of your character — be it man, frog, or cat — and the limbs you see before you match the form you're playing as. If you pick up a weapon, the picture of your arm changes to a show you clutching that weapon, ready for the next encounter.

Adding to the game's realism are the excellent sound effects. The clang of your sword clashing with that of an undead soldier is reproduced as vividly as the sound of your claws whisking through the air as you slash at an enemy. The music is dark and soft, perfectly matching the mood of the game and keeping you ready for that next attack.

All of this work would mean little, though, if not for the excellent game control. *Shadowcaster* uses a fantastic movement and attack interface. Using the right mouse button, you swing your current weapon at whatever is in front of you. Your left button controls movement — moving the mouse left and right turn the character, and forward and backward move your character back and forth. The further your mouse pointer goes from the center of the screen, the faster your character moves. All of this makes moving through corridors (or running from a fight when you have to) quick and easy.

Shadowcaster is a great title. I've spent many hours of great gaming with this one, and I highly recommend it to any fan of action games who's looking for something new.

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Baseline PUBLISHING

Product Information Number 138

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THE HAND OF FATE

Category: Adventure

Developer: Westwood

Publisher: Virgin, 18061 Fitch Avenue, Irvine, CA 92714

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/20 MHz	386DX/33 MHz
20 MB hard-drive space	Sound Blaster,
2 MB RAM	Sound Blaster Pro, Ad Lib,
DOS 5.0 or higher	Ad Lib Gold, Roland MT-32
VGA, Mouse	

TRENT C. WARD

The land of Kyrandia is disappearing — tree by tree, stone by stone, everything is simply vanishing. As usual, the people are too busy with their own affairs to care, leaving the problem to the mystics to solve. But help for the mystics has arrived, in the form of a giant hand. Yep, that's right, a giant hand, one that resembles nothing so much as the gloved Hamburger Helper.

Mr. Hand, as they call him, has discovered the cause of the problem — Kyrandia needs an anchor stone from the center of the world to restore things to their natural order. Oddly, Mr. Hand has chosen Zanthia, the youngest of the mystics, to retrieve the stone and set things right.

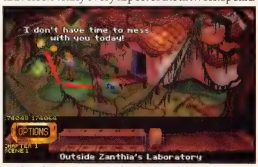
But just as Zanthia is preparing for her journey, she discovers that all of her alchemical equipment has been stolen or destroyed! Can Zanthia save Kyrandia without the aid of potions? The answer lies in *your* ability to solve unusual problems, to interact with strange creatures and people, and to find hidden items along the way. Prepare to enter *The Hand of Fate*, Westwood's much-awaited sequel to *The Legend of Kyrandia*.

Kyrandia fans will be happy to learn that the sequel retains all the features that made the first game so memorable: strange and wondrous landscapes, offbeat humor, and devious puzzles around every corner. The interface is simple yet powerful, making game play nearly seamless — no choosing from a menu of words or cycling through a half-dozen icons to achieve simple goals. Any action can be performed by clicking one of two mouse buttons, a feature that gives you the freedom to forget about mechanics and simply revel in the zany game world.

And a big world it is, with enough puzzles to keep even veteran players busy for hours, yet so well-designed that the action stays fresh and entertaining. And the characters you interact with are actually developed as you adventure — they may look like characters on a screen, but they act like people you might encounter in everyday life.

Zanthia, for example, is a reluctant heroine, annoyed both at being assigned the quest and by the theft of her equipment. Unlike heroines in other video or PC games (and there aren't many), she's assertive, humorous, and often bitingly sarcastic — in a word, *real*. The other characters in the game also have feelings and goals, and they are so well-rendered (especially in closeups) that you feel like you really know them.

The character graphics are only a small part of the beautiful world of Kyrandia. The rich background scenery works in tandem with realistic sound effects to immerse you in this mythical universe. Nearly every aspect of the artwork speaks to the designers' eye for detail, from the misty mountains looming in the distance to fiery rivers of molten lava flowing by you. All of this is accompanied by digitzed sound that manages to make fantastic situations vivid and realistic. Want to hear a dragon cry? Just find a way to upset him. It's all in the game, and it all sounds like it should (or you *think* it would).



The puzzles in *The Hand of Fate* are unusual, and unique. How do you escape from a lovesick Yeti? How do you get a dinosaur to give you a ride? The answers to these problems are even more bizarre than the questions themselves, forcing you to use creative methods to find a solution. And though many of the problems are difficult, I never found them frustrating. The solutions are logical, and always accessible — no more loading a saved game because you forgot to pick something up in chapter one. The game entertained from start to finish, without any boring areas or lengthy cinematic sequences to slow things down.

The Hand of Fate is a great game. While it probably won't convert gamers who aren't graphic adventure fans, those who like this sort of game will love it. The mixture of humor and adventure make for a game that is truly remarkable, one that will leave you eagerly anticipating the next game in the series. The journey ahead of you is long, but Kyrandia is depending on you to prevail. Just remember, in *The Hand of Fate*, things are not always as they seem....

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Mystery Word Grid

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ASK	TABLE	FIT	GAMES	THE
NEBULAR	RUNNING	CAPTAIN	TRILOGY	CARRIER
SPACE	AWE	ROGUE	FAR	PRINT
ANT	GREAT	JET	FIGHT	WIN

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ADVERTISERS INDEX

Company Name	Page Number	Product Information Number
Access	60-61	101
Accolade	25	128
Activision	31	106
Advanced Computer	19	144
Baseline	77	138
Dynamix	23	145
GEnie	5	162
Hi Tech Expressions	15	134
IBM	33	135
Interplay	37, 73	182
Logitech	21	216
Mallard	47	132
Merit	27, 49	220
MicroProse	13, 55, 63,1 BC	221
New World Computing	41	241
Ocean	43, 85	100
Origin	35, 51	102
Pandemonium	79	121
Sierra	BC	109
Sigma Designs	75	142
Sir-tech	3	111
Spectrum Holobyte	6-7	112
SSI	11, 39, 59, 69	113
Suncom	9	149
Triax	67	139
Velocity	45	148
Virgin Interactive	IFC-1	116
Game Players:		
PC Entertainment subscription	17	

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DUNGEON HACK

Category: Fantasy role-playing

Developer: DreamForge (formerly Event Horizon)

Publisher: SSI, 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale CA 94086-2901

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386DX/25 MHz 2 MB RAM 5.3 MB hard-drive space VGA Mouse	Supported sound cards

T. LIAM McDONALD

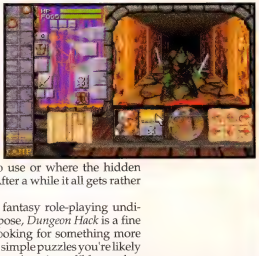
The idea of *Dungeon Hack* is intriguing: never explore the same dungeon twice. The possibilities seem limitless, and there's certainly nothing wrong with the way the DreamForge development team (the people behind *The Summoning* and *Veil of Darkness*) has handled the presentation. Unfortunately, *Dungeon Hack* is plagued with some conceptual problems that no amount of options can remedy: the box copy may proclaim "over 4 billion possible dungeons," but that doesn't necessarily mean that all 4 billion are worth exploring.

In many ways, *Dungeon Hack* seems a lot like SSI's create-your-own-dungeon program *Unlimited Adventures* with a randomizer built right in, but it's more than that. First off, the graphics and sound effects are far better, and the engine altogether superior. The first-person perspective and dark environment are reminiscent of *Eye of the Beholder*, except *Dungeon Hack* adventures are solo. Generating a dungeon is effortless, and the options are wide indeed. All the normal AD&D races, classes, and alignments are available, and characters who complete the dungeon or slay a lot of monsters enter the Hall of Fame with statistics for final experience points, type and quantity of monsters slain, and so forth.

After choosing a character — or creating one of your own — the Dungeon Options screen pops up. You can choose defaults for easy, medium, or hard games, or set each option yourself with the Dungeon Generator and Game Environment menus found here. The Dungeon Generator allows you to pick the depth (from 10 to 25 levels) of the dungeon and the frequency of numerous elements, such as monsters, puzzles, invisible walls, traps, keys, etc. The Game Environment menu, on the other hand, controls monster strength, food requirements, and strength of spells, poison, and enemy magic. You can tweak the options to find just the right type of dungeon, with just the right challenges for your mood. Perhaps the game's most unique wrinkle is the Death Real option, which wipes all your saved games if you die.

All these settings are figured into the randomizer which generates the "look" of the dungeon, and populates it with goodies, monsters, traps, and puzzles, and *lots* of keys — I collected 18 in one level without ever seeing a monster! The dungeons are vast mazes filled with dead ends and locked doors, making the automapping feature (which allows maps to be printed or saved to a file) nearly essential.

The point is to collect keys, stay alive, and work your way through the levels. The monsters get stronger and more numerous as you go along, but soon you begin to wonder just *why* you're here. All the dungeons seem to begin the same way, too: In most every game I played the first floor was the domain of goblins, then came ghouls, then orcs, and so on. In fact, I didn't play a game that *didn't* start with goblins.



While *Dungeon Hack* can make different dungeons every time, it doesn't even try to give you a story, or even a goal, except to keep playing. It's pure hack 'n' slash, and the puzzles are *very* easy — I didn't find many that extended beyond figuring out which key to use or where the hidden doors were located. After a while it all gets rather repetitive.

If you like your fantasy role-playing undiluted by story or purpose, *Dungeon Hack* is a fine game, but if you're looking for something more than pure combat and simple puzzles you're likely to be disappointed. There's an incredible number of dungeons, true, but often the only difference between one dungeon and another is an extra door or the color of the walls, with some different monsters tossed in for good measure.

The real allure of *Dungeon Hack* is in the fact that you never quite know what you're going to see the next time you play. But even something that's constantly fresh has to have a little bit of meat to it, and *Dungeon Hack*, while it tries nobly, simply doesn't offer it.

SPEED RACER

Category: Racing Game

Developer: Accolade

Publisher: Accolade, 5300 Stevens Creek Blvd., San Jose CA

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16MHz	386DX/33MHz
3 MB RAM	AdLib Gold, ProAudio Spectrum, Roland, or Sound Blaster sound cards
8 MB hard-drive space	Mouse, joystick, or flight yoke
DOS 3.3 or higher	

Watching the opening sequences of Accolade's *Speed Racer*, a warm feeling of nostalgia crept over me. The scene of Racer X chewing the fat with Speed Racer — actual footage from the show, mind you — took me back to the days when I would rush home after school to catch Speed's exploits in the incredible Mach 5.

TRENT C. WARD

Anticipating an equally enjoyable PC game, I tore into the package greedily — and I'm still reeling from the strong slap I received from the Hand of Disappointment, thanks in no small part to the great job *Speed Racer*'s opening sequence does in building up the *promise* of a good game. The intro graphics and animations are excellent, and the random voice samples, straight from the TV show, really put you in the mood for a good race. *Speed Racer* definitely sets the mood for some fantasy-racing action; it just doesn't deliver the goods.

The premise of *Speed Racer* is simple enough. You play as either Speed Racer or the mysterious Racer X, taking part in a series of road races on different tracks around the world. Before each race, you're challenged by one of your opponents, and can earn extra points by damaging his car or finishing ahead of him in the race.

Both the Mach 5 and the Shooting Star (Racer X's car) are loaded with special features: retractable, front-mounted circular saws can carve a shortcut through a dense forest; auto jacks vault your car over rivers, chasms, and opponents; and special fuel gives you a much-needed burst of speed. You can purchase new items for your car, or upgrade the old ones, by spending points that you earn through winning races. Sounds great, right? Unfortunately, once you hit the road, game play is so unsatisfying that it wouldn't matter if your car was equipped with laser-guided missiles and a jet engine.

Though the intro is impressive, the graphics in the actual game are grainy, the animation subpar. The animated faces in the view monitor — friends offering encouragement, enemies hurling threats — certainly add to the atmosphere, but have very little to do with game play.

While the sound bites sampled from the cartoon are crisp and clear through a Sound Blaster, the soundtrack doesn't show the same level of quality. The old Speed Racer theme song comes across as flat and unappealing; the only difference between the AdLib and Sound Blaster arrangements is in the tempo (the AdLib version actually sounds more like the original song).

The graphics and sound may be ho-hum, but that's not the major problem with this game; that dubious honor goes to the disastrous game play. The action in *Speed Racer* is abysmal, hampered by everything from confusing racing conditions to a joystick calibration routine that frequently bombs out. The control (when it works properly) is sluggish and unresponsive to the point of being nearly unplayable; even with lots of practice, it's almost impossible to keep the car on the road for a whole race.

The problems extend beyond control mechanics: the Mach 5 has no trouble cruising along on the side of a mountain, but is sent into an uncontrollable spin by the slightest bump from another car. You can earn points by damaging certain cars, but simply running into them sometimes damages you instead, and though the manual tells you how to avoid damage, it never tells you how to dish it out.

Perhaps my disappointment stems from the fact that I really believe a Speed Racer game has the potential to offer up healthy (and equal) doses of humor and action, and that the opportunity was missed. Accolade clearly intended to infuse this game with the wacky style that made the Speed Racer cartoons fun. But the bottom line is that this is a racing game, and there's a lot more to a good racing game than a few audio and video samples from a cartoon — even a hilarious cartoon.

GLOBAL DOMINATION

Category: Military Strategy

Developer: Impressions

Publisher: Impressions, 222 Third Street, Suite 0234, Cambridge MA 02142

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/12MHz	386SX/20MHz
640K RAM	Supported sound card
2.6 MB hard-drive space	Mouse
MS-DOS 3.0 or higher	
VGA	

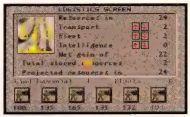
With a name like *Global Domination*, there's little uncertainty as to what this game is all about; the only real question is whether or not it's fun to play. And, in spite of some annoying flaws, the answer is yes.

MARK PITCAVAGE

The globe that players try to dominate — either Earth or a randomly generated planet — is divided into a large number of areas, each with a different economic value. As in the board game Risk (which *Global Domination* resembles in more ways than one), sea-lanes link selected land masses. Players build and maneuver armies, represented by missiles of various sizes; the larger your army, the larger the missile (what would Freud say?).

The armies can consist of a number of different unit types, from infantry to mechanized infantry to heavy tanks to air defense units. Each unit type has particular strengths and weaknesses against other units in combat: Offensive armies may have a preponderance of tanks and mechanized infantry, while defensive armies may concentrate on air defenses and heavy artillery.

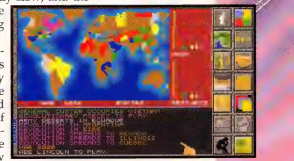
With its flexible army composition and area (as opposed to hex-based) movement, *Global Domination* may remind some players of Realism Entertainment's *Vikings II: Kingdoms of England*. But aside from a radically different setting, *Global Domination* sports several features that give it a higher degree of replayability than Realism's game. Up to five human or computer players can compete, and thankfully a modem-play option is included (only two players can compete over phone lines, however). A rudimentary diplomacy system makes alliances possible, while rebellions (optional) can throw monkey-wrenches in the plans of human and computer-controlled players alike.



Players can also spend money on intelligence services, and if you want to invest enough funds you can try to literally drive an opponent crazy. At the most complex level of play, there's a Satellite Battles option that lets you take direct control of your forces engaged in battle. The Satellite Battles take place in real-time, with the ultimate goal being the destruction of enemy headquarters.

Global Domination has some obvious flaws, the most glaring being the manual, which offers only the most rudimentary instructions. Infuriated because you can't split a particular army? Only by trial and error will you learn that an army that's been split can only be placed in an unoccupied area. The graphics are ho-hum, and the interface isn't exactly a model of efficiency. The "historical" computer players — including notables such as Napoleon, Genghis Khan, Queen Victoria, General Custer, Abe Lincoln, Julius Caesar, and Bismarck (whose place was originally intended to be occupied by Hitler!) pop up occasionally to deliver text-threats written to indicate some kind of accents.

Players attracted by the Risk-like elements might be turned off by how long a game of *Global Domination* can last, especially with two or more human players. Because armies can only move one area during a turn, and because they aren't easily combined or split, there's no such thing as a blitzkrieg. Sea movement is painfully slow, and the Satellite Battles only serve to make the game longer without adding flavor, detail, *or* realism.



But in spite of these drawbacks, *Global Domination* is actually a lot of fun. Game play is very fluid once you become accustomed to the interface, and you'll probably find yourself building armies, invading territories, and repeatedly hitting the End Turn button just to see how things will turn out. The random world generator is fun to watch, and like the modem-play option it gives the game a high degree of replayability. And there's actually some sort of fanfare when you win the game, which players who beat *Syndicate* and *Warlords II* will really appreciate.

With some extra effort, *Global Domination* could have been a first-class strategy game. But even with its flaws it delivers your money's worth, and that alone is enough to recommend it.

COASTER

Category: Design & Simulation

Developer: CTG

Publisher: Disney Software, 500 S. Buena Vista St., Burbank CA 91521

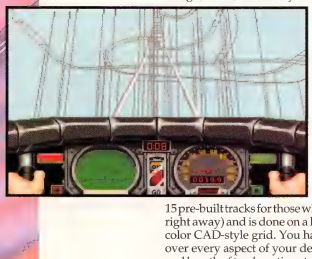
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz	386DX/33 MHz
640K RAM	Expanded memory
1.1 MB hard-drive space	RAM disk
VGA	Supported sound card, Thunderseat
Mouse	

Somewhere between a grueling off-road race and a dizzying aerobatic display lies a singularly masochistic form of joyride called the Roller Coaster. In no other form of entertainment do fragile human beings so willingly subject themselves to the gut-wrenching effects of alternating G-forces, vertigo, and the white-knuckled anticipation of disaster.

SCOTT WOLF

Well, now you don't even have to leave the house to experience that dubious pleasure, thanks to Disney Software's new *Coaster*, which lets you design, build, and ride your own ultimate roller coaster. Over two years in the making, *Coaster* finally arrives as somewhat less than the full-blown product we expected, but it's still a worthy effort, especially considering it's modest price (about 20 bucks).



Designing coasters is surprisingly easy (and Disney has included 15 pre-built tracks for those who want to get started right away) and is done on a high-res 640 x 350 16-color CAD-style grid. You have complete control over every aspect of your design, from the shape and length of track sections to their angle of incline and degree of bank and, yes, loops and corkscrews. You can change the color of the track, alter the effects of gravity, make the supports invisible or even remove the upstops, those under-the-track wheels that keep you from flying off. Once you're satisfied with your design you can name it and autograph it.

Then it's time to head to the Coaster Office (and standard 320 x 200 x 256 VGA) to try out your creation. As you arrive at the boarding platform, you see your coaster's name on the marquee — just hop aboard with a team of six Evaluators and hang on.

The Evaluators are a mixed bag of coaster fans and critics who ride along with you, screaming and taking notes. After each ride you can poll the Evaluators, each of whom has a favorite coaster feature (speed, duration, inversions, etc.). They'll score your design, and part of *Coaster*'s challenge

is to design a track that will please all six Evaluators and garner a high score. This is fun, but it usually leads to a schizophrenic ride with no distinct personality — you're better off just trying to please yourself.

But enough nonsense, let's go for a ride! As the designer, you get to sit up front with a control panel and gauges which indicate vertical and lateral G-forces, speed, and elapsed time and distance. You hear the "Hands and arms inside the car, please" announcement and the hissing release of air brakes as the train lurches forward. Your stomach begins to tighten as you make the agonizing climb up the first hill, accompanied by the torturous clanking of the lift chain. You can see the sickening drop up ahead and the undulating body of the track far below. You crest the hill, the chain releases you with a crunch and....

Well, let's just say that despite it's graphic simplicity (the track is just two parallel rails and the backdrop is a generic grass-mountains-sky affair) the illusion is remarkably convincing, thanks largely to outstanding digital sound effects. On the downside, there's only one view (straight ahead), no tunnels, and no nighttime rides; but *Coaster* still manages to deliver an decent simulation of an experience where all that's really required of you is to sit back and enjoy the ride.

Note to hardcore coaster freaks: For a real boneshaking experience, check out *Coaster* in a ThunderSeat, from Thrustmaster. The 8-inch subwoofer in its base vibrates the entire chair with the low-frequency rumble of the coaster, which gradually diminishes as the ride picks up speed. The enhanced illusion is startling, and you'll swear that you can actually feel the negative G's!

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THE EVEN MORE INCREDIBLE MACHINE

Category: Puzzle

Developer: Dynamix

Publisher: Dynamix, 1600 Mill Race Road, Eugene Oregon 97403

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz 640K RAM 1.6MB hard-drive space VGA Mouse	386/25 MHz Supported Sound Cards

T. LIAM McDONALD

It's obvious that Jeff Tunnell is no stranger to the wacky world of computer puzzle games. The man behind *The Adventures of Willy Beamish* and last year's *The Incredible Machine* has a keen eye for absurd yet accessible brain-teasers. With *The Incredible Machine*, he gave gamers a combination software toy and toolbox, with limitless possibilities for experimentation.

Now, for fans who thought *The Incredible Machine*'s 87 puzzles just weren't enough, Tunnell returns with the devilishly difficult *The Even More Incredible Machine*. *TEMIM* includes the original game in its entirety, along with 73 new levels and five new objects which make this a puzzle-lover's smorgasbord.

The premise behind *The Incredible Machine* involves using common household items that, when activated, create Rube Goldberg contraptions. It's a lot like the old board game Mousetrap, where you used various items to form an elaborate trap to ensnare your opponent. There's no opponent to ensnare in *TEMIM*, but the concept is much the same: You combine items to make a "machine" that performs a specific function.

TEMIM is actually two games in one. The first is a series of increasingly difficult puzzles, teaching the individual physical properties of the more than four dozen items used in the game. These items include a wide variety of balls (bowling, tennis, billiard, and others), scissors, guns, pulleys, windmills, balloons, ropes, generators, fans, and plenty of others useful stuff.

Some items are decidedly silly: a monkey who furiously peddles his exercise bike when tempted with a banana; a spring-loaded boxing glove straight out of the Road Runner cartoons; a mouse on a wheel; and a perpetual-motion trampoline that sends objects ever higher with each bounce. There are animal characters in the game, too. Pokey the Cat will gobble a frantic Mort the Mouse if he can catch him, while Bob the Fish swims aimlessly around, waiting for his bowl to break. Ernie Alligator will eat almost anything that moves, but seems to prefer Mort and the newest addition to the Incredible Machine, Mel Schlemming.

Mel is the focus of many of the new puzzles, the goal often being to get the little tyke into his house without getting him blown up, squashed, eaten, or dropped from extreme heights. This isn't easy, as Mel is basically a lemming in Keds who keeps walking in whichever direction he's headed. And he's not very resilient, as several test drops from various heights soon proves.

Unlike the two-dozen tutorials in the original game, *TEMIM* only gives us one little tutorial on the care and feeding of your free-range Mel, then

throws you straight into the alligator pit. The first new puzzle proves that safeguarding Mel isn't always your top priority: In this one he's merely alligator food, and you have to steer five little Mels into the waiting mouths of four hungry 'gators. Don't worry about who gets the fifth Mel. He won't survive the dynamite.

The other game in *TEMIM* is the Free Form Mode. Here, you have complete freedom to build your own Incredible Machine, using any of the items in Tunnell's attic of useful junk. The challenge is to come up with your own machines and outlandish objectives. When you have a working model, you can run it to amuse yourself, or remove key objects, add "decoy" objects, and challenge a friend to solve the puzzle. Variables for gravity and air pressure allow you to alter the physical properties of the various items. Free Form Mode is a great puzzle construction tool and lots of fun.

The Even More Incredible Machine is a good value, retailing for less than $50. Owners of *The Incredible Machine* might have found an add-on disk more appropriate (and cost-effective), since most of the game remains unchanged. But if you're a puzzle fan who hasn't picked up the original, you'll definitely want to explore the zany world of *The Even More Incredible Machine*.

HEIRS TO THE THRONE

Category: Strategy

Developer: German Design Group

Publisher: QQP, 1046 River Avenue, Flemington, NJ 08822

Rating:

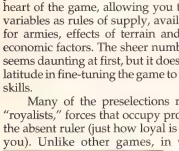
REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/10 MHz	386SX/20 MHz
640K RAM	VGA
2.7 MB hard-drive space	AdLib, Sound Blaster, or compatibles
DOS 3.3 or higher	
EGA/VGA, Mouse	

Developed in Germany and brought across the Atlantic by QQP, this game of conquest mixes equal doses of strategy and resource management. Set on a fictional medieval continent, the game pits up to four barons (human- or computer-controlled) against each other in a battle to take control of the kingdom while the true heir to the throne is away waging war.

MARK PITCAVAGE

Just getting started with *Heirs to the Throne* can take a while — there are six screens of options and settings that can be tweaked. These options, or preselections as the manual calls them, are the heart of the game, allowing you to modify such variables as rules of supply, available unit types for armies, effects of terrain and weather, and economic factors. The sheer number of variables seems daunting at first, but it does give you great latitude in fine-tuning the game to your tastes and skills.

Many of the preselections manipulate the "royalists," forces that occupy provinces loyal to the absent ruler (just how loyal is determined by you). Unlike other games, in which neutral forces are about as powerful as the Danish army, the royalists can be more dangerous than other human or computer opponents. They build up their armies rapidly and, if you choose to make them hostile, can even start attacking *you*. Furthermore, the legitimate heir can return from his crusade, take command of the royalists, and *really* start kicking armor.



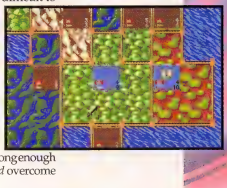
Each game takes place on a continent divided into a number of provinces. How many provinces you select greatly affects the action — a game with only 16 provinces will have players at each other's throats quickly, while a greater number of provinces means players will usually spend some time expanding into Royalist territories.

The game maps — randomly generated and rendered in blocky graphics — show little variety, and are indicative of the generally poor graphics throughout the game. The lush renditions of terrain depicted in games like *Warlords II* and *Vikings II: Kingdoms of England* make you *want* to roam around the countryside; in *Heirs*, even the introductory scenes — where designers usually showcase their best graphics and animation — are flat and unappealing.

Game play is simple and straightforward. After an income phase (in which all the barons collect taxes from the provinces they control) and a supply phase (assuming you've toggled that option on) comes an attack phase. Players may attack adjacent provinces with any and all forces that can be brought to bear, but each army can only attack once. When combat occurs, a special screen pops up, showing the relative strength of the two sides. Unfortunately, it's difficult to determine how many troops you'll need to be successful in an attack, and unlike similar screens in *Vikings II*, little useful information is provided once combat is begun. Tactical control during battle is limited to attacking and retreating.

Oddly, no attempt is made to graphically depict battles, even though they make up a great part of game play: All you get is a barren landscape with a static graphic shell displaying the relative strengths of troops. What seems to be missing most is movement and finesse: Every game seems like an out-and-out slugfest.

In most war games, movement precedes combat. But in *Heirs* it's the other way around, and the net effect is a slower game because it's difficult to effectively position your troops for an attack. After moving your forces, you can spend the money you've collected on recruiting troops, building villages or fortifications, or buying supplies.



The preselections, while extensive, tend to make a game that isn't easy to win in the first place even more difficult. Computer-controlled barons unerringly build up their strongest armies opposite your strongest armies, and human players may be hard-pressed to build forces strong enough to both compete against other barons *and* overcome royalist territory.

Heirs is more fun to play if you have human opponents, though there's no modem-play option. But even with human opponents, *Heirs to the Throne* isn't very exciting, certainly isn't pretty to look at, and doesn't have much atmosphere.

THE GREAT WAR: 1914-1918

Category: Tactical War Game

Developer: Blue Byte

Publisher: SSI, 675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201, Sunnyvale CA 94086-2901

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/12 MHz 640K RAM 8 MB hard-drive space VGA	386SX/16 MHz AdLib, Sound Blaster, or compatible sound cards Mouse or joystick

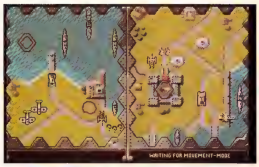
WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Consumers browsing through their local software outlet might at first take *The Great War* for a typical, hardcore SSI war game. Certainly the box art, depicting in khaki-colored monochrome a rhomboidal World War One tank and a line of doughboys going "over the top," hints at a mammoth game with a database the size of Chicago and an interface more complicated than a Bach fugue.

What's inside, though, is the exact same engine as found in *Battle Isle*, the futuristic war-game developed by *TGW* creators Blue Byte and published in the U.S. by UbiSoft. The only difference is that the unit icons represent the many types of weaponry developed during the "War to end all Wars."

The game progresses, roughly in chronological order, through 24 self-contained battles, starting in August, 1914. As time passes, new units — each with very distinct capabilities — are added to the player's arsenal. And therein lies much of the game's charm: being able to deploy dreadnoughts, U-boats, 18 kinds of aircraft (19 if you count the balloons, which function more or less as *roadblocks*, forcing the enemy to detour around them!), as well as such exotica as armored trains and stupendously powerful "Big Bertha" railway artillery.

Each game is played out in the familiar movement/combat phase system. The hex-based map is divided in half to show tactical movement for both the German and French forces — and to allow two human players to issue commands simultaneously — but none of the battlefields is so large as to make this confusing. Once combat actions are plotted, their resolution is shown by means of full-screen animated shoot-outs. The graphics in these scenes are a lot chunkier than we've become used to, but I think these sequences are often clever and entertaining. If you get tired of watching them, though, you have the option to cut them off.



TGW becomes very easy to play once you figure out how to switch between combat and movement phases. Doing that, however, is *not* so easy, due to a strangely counter-intuitive interface. To issue attack and movement orders, you use a joystick or mouse to position a cursor over a unit, click and hold the mouse or joystick button, then move the mouse/joystick in one of several directions. Perhaps the most confusion arises when it's time to switch between combat and movement phases, thanks to a misleading paragraph in the manual. Under the Change of Phase section, the manual states that "the computer will tell you to press F1 to confirm that you wish to change the phase." In fact, the computer gives you the cryptic message "Quit with joystick button," which actually means press the button if you're *not* ready to end the phase.

In order to set things in motion you must position the cursor on an empty hex; click and hold the left mouse button; move the mouse to the left, still holding the left mouse button, until a arrow appears; then press F1. In short, the absurd, pick-and-shovel interface from *Battle Isle* has been retained, despite a flood of complaints from reviewers and consumers.

It's an annoying system, yes, but in spite of it I found *The Great War* to be a delightfully easy-to-play game that offers plenty of challenge even to an experienced desktop tactician. The handsomely rendered terrain maps are varied and offer interesting possibilities — armored-train blitzkriegs, amphibious attacks behind enemy lines, and bomber offensives that are quite a bit more effective than any real WWI missions ever were. The incredible mix of technologies (horse-cavalry, armored cars, submarines, and concrete blockhouses, all arrayed in the same battle) invites all sorts of wacky let's-try-it-and-see-what-happens maneuvers.

Gamers seeking a serious, in-depth simulation of World War One will have to look elsewhere — though I'm not really sure there's another one currently on the market. But for solid, fast-paced war-gaming, *The Great War* goes "over the top" with bayonets fixed. ▽

MY OWN STORIES

Category: Educational

Developer: MECC

Publisher: MECC, 6160 Summit Drive N. Minneapolis, MN 55430-4003

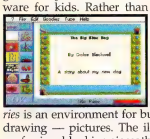
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX or better	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card
3.5 MB hard-drive space	
1 MB RAM	
DOS 5.0 or higher	
VGA, mouse	

Some kids can't stop telling stories, and others can't get started. MECC's *My Own Stories* is a good choice for both kinds of children. To foster story-telling skills in every child, this new package features a simple but adequate word processor and a flashy, but limited, graphics module. Together, they allow your children to write and illustrate their own story books.

HEIDI AYCOCK

While many programs encourage and aid communication skills, the graphics module distinguishes *My Own Stories* from other creativity software for kids. Rather than packaging a set of drawing and painting tools, MECC included a collection of pre-drawn scenery, people, furniture, and other objects. As a result, *My Own Stories* is an environment for building — instead of drawing — pictures. The illustrations are nice, professional-looking pieces that few children could produce on their own.



It may seem like *My Own Stories* stifles creativity by providing these pre-drawn pictures, but in reality the opposite is true. The focus of *My Own Stories* is on the process of story-telling, not the process of drawing an illustration. The illustrations really serve as catalysts for the storytelling process. For instance, a child might first place a dog and a boy in a park. And from their, he or she can create a story to explain the scene. Because the pictures come out so beautifully with so little effort, kids can concentrate on the plot of the story rather than how to draw one scene.

Having related the plot, kids can print the stories. Without a laser printer, however, adults shouldn't place much importance on this feature. On my 24-pin black-and-white printer, the output was indistinct and dull. It was good enough, though, that a child could print the story and then color the pages.

The program also includes sound and music. Generally, sound effects are very attractive to children, but this program doesn't provide enough variety to make this feature a significant contribution. On the other hand, the music is a clever addition, allowing children to choose from 27 opening and closing themes for their on-line story books.

My Own Stories is like an older MECC product called *Storybook Weaver*, but that package was built primarily for telling fantasy stories. It featured pictures of dragons, castles, and so on. The beauty of *My Own Stories* is that it's set in the real world. Its graphic objects include a basketball hoop, several kinds of boats, and — to MECC's credit — a wheelchair. Its characters include males and females of different ages, races, and occupations. And the background scenes range from parks to malls to gymnasiums.

The disadvantage of these real world objects is that they can't accommodate every child's interests and experiences. By exploring the graphic objects, though, kids can find out what topics are covered. Few children are left out completely.

The advantage of these real-world objects is that most kids can write about their very own lives. They can see that their experiences are as interesting — and perhaps even as adventurous — as the experiences of imaginary characters. They can express what they expect from upcoming crises in their lives, and they can relate how they felt about past experiences.

Certainly, any child who uses *My Own Stories* will find a friendly outlet for his or her imagination and memory. As a result, some parents may hear a little less from their talkative kids, while others may find out a little more from their introspective children. The communication through stories will be interesting and rewarding for everyone.

BODY BLOWS

Category: Fighting

Developer: Team 17 Ltd.

Publisher: MicroLeague, University Office Plaza, Bellevue Building Suite 201, 262 Chapman Road Newark DE 19702

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 or better	386 SX or better
640K RAM	Supported sound cards
2MB Hard-drive space	Joystick (preferably a game-pad)
DOS 3.0 or higher	
VGA	

Are you tough enough to take on the best martial artists in the world? Then step up to *Body Blows*, the latest in the growing category of PC fighting games. With the recent craze over fighting games in the cartridge world, it was just a matter of time before games of this genre bled over into the PC market. And so far, MicroLeague's new *Body Blows* — although not perfect — is better than most of them. Combining an easy-to-use fighting interface with satisfactory graphics, Microleague has raised the stakes for PC fighting games

TRENT C WARD

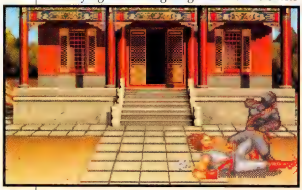
Body Blows is a standard fighting game, consisting of two characters using different moves to try to defeat each other in hand-to-hand combat. You can choose from ten different characters, each with their own special skills and abilities. These characters and their special powers are one of the things that set this game apart from its competition. Not just your standard fare, these heroes (and one heroine) vary from a business man who can turn into a tornado to a sword-toting ninja who turns invisible, detectable only by slight ripples in the screen. The characters' advantages and disadvantages balance out well though, making them roughly equal in ability.

But great characters alone aren't enough, and by now most of you fighting enthusiasts are probably saying "Yeah, but how does it play?" As most fans know, the PC joystick may be one of the worst problems facing game developers who write action titles. While great for flight simulations, its analog action isn't well suited for fighting games, making it difficult to control the complex combinations of moves required to bring these titles to life. *Body Blows* handles this problem by making all of the moves in the game operate off of a single button, a simplified setup that's much more effective than some of the frustrating methods used in other games of this type. I still highly recommend the use of a pad such as the Gravis GamePad, as the long throw required to reach each compass point using a standard joystick may slow you down in even this simplest of interfaces.

The graphics in *Body Blows* are pretty good. The character art and backgrounds are colorful and nicely shaded, although certainly not top-of-the-line. The animation is smooth and responsive, with little lag-time between your commands and your on-screen character's reaction.

Sound is a mixed bag, with great music and not-so-great effects. The intro and game music is fast-paced and catchy, without being repetitive. But the action effects are just OK, and the digitized speech is choppy and often hard to understand.

All in all, *Body Blows* is a good game. The smooth game play and pleasant artwork make for a satisfying round of fighting action. Gamers who



aren't familiar with the console or arcade fighting games will find this title to be a great addition to their collections. Fans of the Super NES' or Sega Genesis' fast-paced action and immediate response will probably find this game to be better than most of you fighting enthusiasts are probably saying "Yeah, but how does it play?" As most fans know, the PC joystick may be one of the worst problems facing game developers who write action titles. While great for flight simulations, its analog action isn't well suited for fighting games, making it difficult to control the complex combinations of moves required to bring these titles to life. *Body Blows* handles this problem by making all of the moves in the game operate off of a single button, a simplified setup that's much more effective than some of the frustrating methods used in other games of this type. I still highly recommend the use of a pad such as the Gravis GamePad, as the long throw required to reach each compass point using a standard joystick may slow you down in even this simplest of interfaces.

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STRIKE SQUAD

Category: Science-fiction/Tactical combat

Developer: Mindcraft

Publisher: Mindcraft 2291 205th St. Suite 201, Torrance, CA 90501

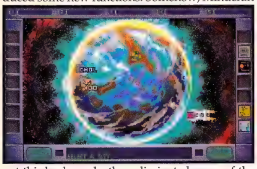
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz 2 MB RAM 17 MB hard-drive space, VGA	386DX/25 MHz 3 MB RAM AdLib, Disney Sound Source, Sound Blaster, and compatibles

T. LIAM McDONALD

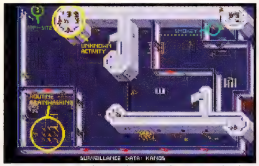
It is quite telling that nowhere on the packaging or in the documentation for *Strike Squad* is there any mention that it is, in fact, a sequel to last year's *Tegel's Mercenaries*. *Tegel's* was a good idea with some interesting elements, but was ultimately undermined by poor design and slipshod programming.

Starting afresh, *Strike Squad* promised a new, improved game that preserved the best qualities of its predecessor, eliminated the bugs, and introduced some new functions. Somehow, Mindcraft got this backwards: they eliminated some of the functions of *Tegel's* that *did* work well, and introduced new and improved bugs.



The point of *Strike Squad* is to assemble a team of four mercenaries and execute commando raids on the surface of various planets. The story picks up with the evil, insectoid K'kistiks overrunning all the planets in the Consortium, a type of intergalactic United Nations. The only hope for the Consortium are the highly trained and well-equipped mercenaries who roam the galaxy, hiring themselves out to the highest bidder. These "mercs" are gathered on a mothership and, for a fee, are available for missions.

Retaining the design team, story, milieu, and distinctive look of its predecessor, *Strike Squad* sets out full of good intentions. A spiffy new manual promises new features and new weapons. The



Japanimation-style graphics are distinct and colorful, and the top-down view gives a pretty good perspective on the action. A number of mercenaries are available, each with his, her, and *its* own skills: heavy weapons, light weapons, demolition, medical, hand-to-hand combat, stealth, computer hacking, etc. A satisfying variety of weapons is at your disposal, including all kinds of pistols, machine guns, rifles, lasers, flame guns, rocket launchers, and explosives. Once chosen, the squad hops in a drop shuttle and heads for the planet.

So far, so good — it seems as though every ingredient is set to unite and make *Strike Squad* an entertaining little game, heavy on the carnage but spiced with a unique, cartoonlike style.

But once the mercs get to the planet surface, things begin to fall apart. The glitchy interface of *Tegel's* has been preserved, but it's gotten even worse. In *Tegel's* you could plot multiple actions — move, follow someone, engage the enemy, or perform an action — for *each* merc, all in real time. But this helpful feature is gone, forcing you to use the mouse to "steer" the mercs through the landscape. Mercs blithely ignore orders to follow anyone but the leader; what's more, there doesn't appear to be any way to get them to *not* follow the leader. If a merc is steered away from the squad to do something, it will snap back like a rubber band once it's reached its destination, returning to the leader whether you want it to or not.

The game also suffers random lockups, and leaves text printed on the screen after saving or loading. Function buttons often have to be depressed several times before they work. In heavy-fire situations, the program occasionally skips like a dirty CD. Sometimes it forgets the mercs are on the drop-shuttle, and you have to get them all off and put them back on again. Upon landing, some mercs wander off in mad circles for no reason, exposing themselves to fire.

This is indeed a shame. *Strike Squad* could have been a lot of fun, but a maddening number of problems makes it very difficult to play and impossible to enjoy. As far as *Tegel's Mercenaries* and *Strike Squad* go, two strikes and you're out.

DINOPARK TYCOON

Category: Educational simulation

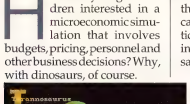
Developer: MECC

Publisher: MECC, 6160 Summit Drive N, Minneapolis MN 55430-4003

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/16 MHz 2 MB RAM DOS 5.0 or higher 5.2 MB hard-drive space VGA Mouse	386DX/25 MHz AdLib or Sound Blaster

How do you get children interested in a microeconomic simulation that involves budgets, pricing, personnel and other business decisions? Why, with dinosaurs, of course.



Dinopark Tycoon takes its cue from *Jurassic Park*, letting the player build and manage a dinosaur zoo. You buy the land, buy the dinosaurs, set ticket prices, and hire people to run the park.

Though aimed at ages 8 and up, *Dinopark Tycoon* is not a simple simulation. You start with an austere budget of $5,000, and you've got a lot of up-front expenses—buying land, putting up fences, erecting buildings, buying dinosaurs, and stockpiling food for your critters.

You make purchases and business decisions in the business district. There are dozens of dinosaur species to choose from, each with its own requirements of climate and diet. Further, each decision is affected by variables: Do you build in the desert, plains, or marshland? If you pick, say, the desert, what type of dinos can live there? How many employees can you afford? Is it time to raise ticket prices? Will an investment in a parking lot result in enough satisfied customers?

Players will learn more than how to survive in a tough entrepreneurial climate. There's a good deal of information at hand about the dinosaurs, from extinction theories to the size and diet of individual species.

The animations are effective but simple. Dinosaurs wander around their pens as visitors file by to see them. Traffic is a good gauge of your park's health; as you play cars drive in and out of the parking lot. Sound effects also are quite good, with an occasional roar from a T-Rex livening things up.

Though it's based on a pretty sophisticated economic model, *Dinopark Tycoon* is sure to hook young gamers immediately. It's fact-filled, interesting to watch, and doesn't take itself too seriously. Best of all, it teaches problem-solving and resource-management skills in a framework that will captivate your kids.

— Lee Buchanan

THE GEEKWAD— GAMES OF THE GALAXY

Category: Arcade action

Developer: Tsunami

Publisher: Tsunami Media, 50484 Snowy Creek Way, Coarsegold, CA 93614

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386/25 MHz or better 640K RAM 5 MB hard-drive space DOS 5.0 or higher VGA Mouse	Sound Blaster or compatible sound card Joystick

The classic games never go away—that's why they're classics. And a hundred years from now, our descendants will probably be playing holographic versions of such arcade perennials as *Frogger*, *Defender*, and *Space Invaders*.

Tsunami has brought back five arcade favorites in parody form, with excellent graphics and sound, and a humorous front-end scenario that adds touches like a trivia contest and a puzzle-solving game. The result is a suite of simple pleasures that you'll keep on your hard drive and find yourself playing frequently.

The scenario is that you must help Geekwad Gamer save King Wacky from the clutches of the Cybergeek. You do this by beating the Cybergeek's high scores on the five arcade titles, unscramble a security code, and then defuse a bomb. If you correctly answer trivia questions proffered by some of your spaceship's distinguished passengers—caricatures of folks like Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, Robbie the Robot, Billy Idol (Cybergeek), and others.

But the games themselves are the key to this product's success. In *Beefender*, you swoop through the skies saving your grazing cattle from the clutches of the Bovine Liberation Organization. It's an excellent implementation of the *Defender* space-action game.

In *Spaced Solicitors*, you help Granny keep those darn salesman from the front door by blasting them as they descend — a first-rate version of *Space Invaders*. *Grogger* requires you to navigate your way across

dangerous territory to serve your customers. In *Phlegmings*, you swing a golf club at Phlegm balls before they hatch and attach their gooey selves to your person — ugghh. And in *Earth Last*, you'll catch alien cigar ashes, hurled chunks, and more, all in an effort to save our planet.

Like in most collections of this sort that are bound to get

some playing time during the workday, *Geekwad* features a Boss key that pops up a bogus spreadsheet. But there's also a Hate-My-Boss key that pops up a screen image that's sure to get you fired.

The same design team that developed *Wacky Funsters* created *The Geekwad*, and I'm pleased to say that their programming and design talents are as good as their senses of humor. This is yet another example of how the simple pleasures can be among the best when it comes to computer games.

— Selby Bateman

HOMEY D. CLOWN

Category: Action

Developer: Capstone

Publisher: Capstone, 7200 Corporate Center Drive, Suite 500, Miami, FL 33126

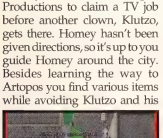
Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 or faster 640K RAM 2MB hard-drive space VGA	Mouse

There are few computer games that are *truly* obnoxious, but *Homey D. Clown* ought to carry a "Peee-U!" rating.

At first blush, you can see how the "In Living Color" character from Fox Television might seem like a good license to create a computer game around. In fact, however, bringing it off without being offensive is extraordinarily hard. Added to that initial problem is the fact that game play itself turns out to have a closed-loop repetitiveness that is deadening.

The premise here is that Homey D. Clown needs to find his way across town to Artopos Productions to claim a TV job before another clown, Klutzo, gets there. Homey hasn't been given directions, so it's up to you guide Homey around the city. Besides learning the way to Artopos you find various items while avoiding Klutzo and his



gang, as well as a host of tourists, thugs, and speeding cars.

And here's where the problems start. When Homey runs into tourists, they ask him to perform. An option window pops up, and you get to choose one of three responses: "I don't think so," "Homey don't play that," or "Homey don't make no fool out of himself." You get to hear the selected response as a digitized voice. Then Homey can walk away. No matter which response you select, nothing else happens. It just happens over and over and over again.

The same type of problem crops up with thugs and with Klutzo. They mug Homey and the

wakes up in the hospital. A nurse comes in and says the same thing to him over and over and over again. After you've been to the hospital a hundred times and after you've selected one of the three dialogue responses a hundred times, you start to ask yourself if you shouldn't turn off the computer and move along with your own life.

Yes, you can visit the laundromat, ride the subway, and get money at the pawn shop. You can climb up onto roofs and find items — such as coins, things to pawn, etc. But sooner rather than later you'll be back in the hospital or clicking on the same three dialogue responses. There are a few other events and options in *Homey D. Clown*, but this game is really a one-trick pony — and it's not a very good trick to begin with.

Capstone has done a lot better than this in the past — *Trump Castle 3* and *Grandmaster Chess* spring immediately to mind. Let's let Homey walk off into the sunset.

— Selby Bateman

KID'S ZOO

Category: Educational

Developer: Knowledge Adventure

Publisher: Knowledge Adventure, 50484 Snowy Creek Way, Coarsegold, CA 93614

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 or faster 640K RAM 8 MB hard-drive space VGA	386DX/25 MHz 4 MB RAM DOS 5.0 or higher, or memory manager Supported sound card Mouse

From the minute you see the main menu of *Kid's Zoo*, it's obvious that Knowledge Adventure took special care to make this a fun and friendly environment for chil-

dren to learn about baby animals. Written and spoken introductions to the eight activities included make it easy for kids to know where to click in order to begin the fun. The range and variety of activities reveal considerable imagination and attention to detail, and the contents of each is designed to encourage children to explore other parts of the program.

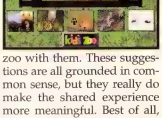
The Movie Theater lets you view five video clips of baby animals in their natural habitats. There's a Talking Storybook, which uses the "chicken-or-egg?" conundrum to illustrate some basic facts about the relationship between parents and young. Animals are shown, of course, but the points are gently carried through to human relationships, too.

Kids are asked to identify animal noises in "Who Makes This Sound?", but this particular activity has some annoying flaws — the sequence of sounds never changes, and if a child guesses incorrectly he has to start *all* over again.

Especially intriguing is the Encyclopedia, in which a horizontal scale can be clicked on to produce digitized pictures and short but well-chosen bits of information about the size, lifespan, and speed of various animals. Each digitized picture has "hot spots" that contain specific info on each animal, and allow the child to branch off easily into different topics. Start with a zebra, for instance, and just by clicking on the bubbles in each picture you might end up with a human mother nursing a baby!

"Where Do I Live?" links animals with their biospheres, and the "Who Am I?" game turns a fairly rigorous course in critter-identification into a simple, but evidently very satisfying, game. Most challenging of all is the "Photo Safari," which lets kids identify 92 animals in alphabetical sequence.

Documentation is excellent, with a helpful list of suggestions on ways to interact with your kids while exploring the



zoo with them. These suggestions are all grounded in common sense, but they really do make the shared experience more meaningful. Best of all, the digitized speech (which accompanies all the writing on the screen) and high-quality photographic images make this a true multimedia experience — without the necessity of a CD-ROM drive.

— William R. Trotter

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

Category: Electronic Book

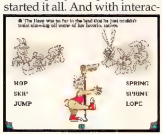
Developer: Broderbund

Publisher: Broderbund, 500 Redwood Blvd., Novato CA 94948-6121.

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
Windows 3.1 386SX/20 MHz with 4MB RAM CD-ROM drive, hard drive DOS 3.3 or higher SVGA MPC — compatible sound card	486SX/25 MHz or faster

There are lots of "interactive books" on the market that combine text, graphics, animation, and music, but Broderbund was the company that pretty much started it all. And with interactive books, as with most things in life, the original is always better than the imitations — a lesson that can be learned after one session with *The Tortoise and the Hare*, one of Broderbund's latest additions to its CD-ROM-based Living Book series. It is, in a word, superb.



No matter how closely you examine this product, all you find is excellence, from the amazingly apt voice-acting and silky-smooth animation to the professional music and catchy sound effects. Every aspect of the program reveals a commitment to quality that other interactive book publishers would do well to emulate.

The classic fable of the slow-but-steady tortoise and fast-but-thoughtless hare is narrated by a purple bird named Simon. In "Read to Me" mode, Simon simply reads the story page by page; "Let Me Play" allows you to point and click on a wide variety of objects on each page to see animations and hear music and sound effects.

You might think an adult would be bored by this stuff, but you'd be wrong. I'm a pretty jaded gamer, but Broderbund has packed each page with so many zany animations that exploring was as much fun for me as for the kids I watched playing the game.

The garden where the hare takes a snack break during the race is a perfect example. Click on a tomato, and a female voice sings a single note; click on another, and a male voice sings a different note; click on yet another, and all the tomatoes join together and begin singing along to an island rhythm about...well, about being tomatoes. A row of carrots provides a counting lesson, a cabbage turns into a flying saucer, and clicking on Simon elicits a knowing remark from the narrator.

You can read/play *The Tortoise and the Hare* in English or Spanish, but whichever you choose you'll be amazed at just how much fun has been packed into this CD. It's cute and charming stuff, true, but it's also genuinely funny and engaging. If you own a CD-ROM unit and have kids, *The Tortoise and The Hare* is a must.

— *Stephen Poole*

ROSEMARY WEST'S HOUSE OF FORTUNES

Category: Entertainment

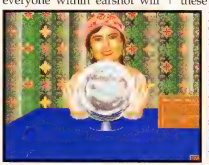
Developer: Villa Crespo

Publisher: Villa Crespo, 1785 McGovern St., Highland Park, IL 60035

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286 or better 640K RAM 6 to 9 MB hard-drive space	386DX/33 MHz 2 MB RAM SVGA Sound Blaster or compatible sound cards Mouse Printer

Even people who don't believe in fortune telling are often fascinated by it. Just think of all the times you've read your horoscope aloud at work, and how everyone within earshot will run over and ask to hear their's read too. No one takes it seriously, but it's still a lot of fun to hear evaluations of your character and predictions for your future.



And that's the appeal of *Rosemary West's House of Fortunes*. While most of us wouldn't dream of going to a fortune teller, we will play around with a fortune-telling *program* at the drop of a crystal ball.

Five fortune-telling techniques — tarot, astrology, numerology, the I Ching, and crystal-ball reading — are included, and printouts are available for any reading you have done. Of the five, the I Ching and numerology probably come closest to duplicating the sort of experience you'd get from a real-life practitioner. Using the mouse-based interface is considerably easier than trying to learn any of these divination methods on your own, but if you're interested in finding out about the origins and practice of any of these techniques, the manual provides a brief history of each and how it's currently practiced.

There's also a reminder feature that notifies you of any birthdays and anniversaries coming up in the next 10 days — a subtle way to get you to keep coming back to the *House of Fortunes*.

Rosemary West's House of Fortunes isn't for everyone, but it is easy to use and lots of fun, especially at a party or get-together (remember the horoscopes in the office?). And though Villa Crespo certainly isn't advising you to use *House of Fortunes* to make important decisions, you may find it more valuable than you think. After all, at least you'll *think* about what the program has said about you and your future, and that in itself could lead to a little enlightenment — from within.

— *Stephen Poole*

THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES

Category: Graphic Adventure

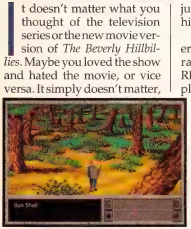
Developer: Capstone

Publisher: Capstone, 7200 Corporate Center Drive, Suite 500, Miami FL 33126

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/12 or faster 640K RAM 5 MB hard-drive space VGA	N/A

It doesn't matter what you thought of the television series or the new movie version of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Maybe you loved the show and hated the movie, or vice versa. It simply doesn't matter,



because Capstone's PC game is atrocious. In fact, if we were to give an award for the worst game of the year, this one has the inside track.

The very first task you're faced with in the game — shooting a rabbit — is such an obtuse puzzle that you might find yourself taking the game back for a refund before you solve it. It's easy to find the rabbit, but you can't just shoot it. No, instead you have to corner the critter — and accomplishing it would require hours of trial-and-error. There's some logic to the process, in that Jethro tells you that you should come at the rabbit from "different directions." But before you can get the rabbit, you must first figure out that the Tennessee scene is actually a 16-square grid of screens; that some screens don't connect to adjacent screens; that if you chase the rabbit into a screen with a rabbit hole, he'll jump in and hide; and that there's *one* rabbit hole that old Mr. Bunny *won't* jump into — *if* you approach him from a certain direction.

And as though the designers *knew* the game would enrage you, they included a README.TXT file with a complete walk-through. But even this doesn't help, because the solution to your problem is almost always more angering than the nonsensical puzzles themselves! When you see what you were *supposed* to do, you'll realize that there was no way you could have known what was expected of you.

Even with the rabbit out of the way, the game doesn't get any better. The very next scene involves driving to Los Angeles, and may be the worst bit of puzzle design I've ever seen. If you were to tape kernels of corn to your cursor keys, a chicken would have as much luck getting the Clampetts to California as you would.

Once you make it to Beverly Hills, find your house, and the tired, clumsy graphic-

adventure stuff kicks in, you'll probably be ready to cry uncle. About the only thing that would keep you playing is masochism; the graphics, music, cardboard characters, and feeble attempts at humor certainly won't.

— Matthew Firme

ALLIE'S PLAYHOUSE

Category: Educational

Developer: Opcode Interactive

Publisher: Opcode Interactive, 3950 Fabian Way, Suite 100 Palo Alto, CA 94303

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
386SX/20 MHz with 4MB RAM CD-ROM drive, hard drive Windows 3.1 and DOS 3.3 or higher SVGA MPC compliant sound card	486SX/25 MHz or faster

Allie's Playhouse is a jack of all trades: This debut CD-ROM release from newcomer Opcode Interactive features over a dozen activities and games for kids ages 3 to 8. And although none of these games provides intensive tutoring in any one area, the overall package does a good job of fostering basic learning skills. No matter what your child's interest, he or she will probably find several

things that will keep them coming back again and again.

One reason kids will like *Allie's Playhouse* is that it's so friendly. Before a child enters the Playhouse, for example, he or she picks a friend from six digitized photos. The six friends are racially diverse, so almost all kids will find someone they can identify with. The friend acts as a guide, offering simple yet concise directions to every game, activity, or puzzle; they do such a good job, in fact, that there's no need for instructions in the manual. And let's not forget Allie, the little green alien who joins the player and his friend for many of the games.

The activities in the Playhouse either encourage creativity (the Funny Face Theatre, Dinosaur Coloring Book, and the Instrument Construction Kit) or teach kids basic facts about topics like anatomy, music, animals, addition, time, astronomy, and the alphabet.

To play, kids simply click on items in the main room of the Playhouse (there's another room, the kitchen, but there's only one game there).

Most of the games focus on recognition and association. In the music game, for instance, kids first click on 16 instruments to hear what they sound like. Then, when they're ready, they can play the game — a note is played, and they must identify the instrument that made it. If they don't get it right after three attempts, the correct answer is displayed — no frustration to get in the way of the fun.

And fun is what *Allie's Playhouse* is all about. This is the sort of program you can load up for your children and then let them take off on their own, and that in itself fosters independence — another thing kids love. Stimulating, educational, and friendly, *Allie's Playhouse* is a real treat for the younger set.

—Stephen Poole

VIDEO CUBE: SPACE

Category: Puzzle

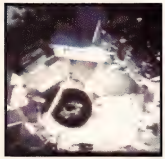
Developer: Aris

Publisher: Aris Entertainment, 310 Washington Blvd., suite 100 Marina del Rey, CA 90292

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
Windows 3.1 386DX-33 or better 4 MB RAM CD-ROM drive (150 K/sec minimum data transfer rate) SVGA with 512K video RAM	486SX-25 MPC-compatible sound boards Double speed CD-ROM drive

Search your memory and try to conjure up an image: a look of desperation on the face of someone frantically twisting the facets of a multi-colored plastic cube. Yep, it's Rubik's Cube,



that wicked little purveyor of frustration and carpal tunnel syndrome. And just when you thought it was safe to contemplate spatial relationships again, Aris Entertainment comes up with *Video Cube: Space*. At least your wrists are safe this time.

Video Cube: Space is an enjoyable little CD-ROM puzzle game that paraphrases Rubik's Cube by making each facet of the cube a scrambled-picture puzzle. You're racing against the clock to solve all six sides and move up through the levels. Each time you solve a side, you're rewarded with neat mini-movies — which, in this particular version, all have a space theme.

The first few levels are really simple, and unfortunately give you a false confidence as you head into the really tough stuff. The puzzles become more complex as you progress, starting with 16 pieces for an image and increasing in number as you progress through the game. The ability to perceive a full image from image fragments — eidetic imagery, if you will — is a prime requisite for success with *Video Cube: Space*.

The graphics are generally good — although the full-motion video is slightly choppy unless you have a double-spin CD-ROM drive — and the interface is simplicity itself. The sound effects really add to game play, especially if you have one of the better sound boards, but the music is a little tame to be termed "shredding" — the company's description, not mine. Let's just say Steve Vai has nothing to worry about.

Although there are too many pretenders to the *Tetris* throne to count, *Video Cube: Space* deserves to be included

among those games so addicting as to tempt you to risk fate by playing it at your desk when you should be getting out that financial report. But as in *Tetris*, there's a boss key. So enjoy, and don't blame us if your next job evaluation reeks. We did warn you, after all.

— Gary Meredith

POSITRONIC BRIDGE

Category: Bridge simulation

Developer: Positronic Software

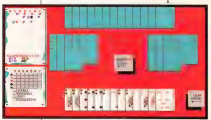
Publisher: ReadySoft, 30 Wertheim Court, Suite 2, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada, L4B 1B9

Rating:

REQUIRED	WE RECOMMEND
286/10 MHz 640K RAM 2.2 MB hard-drive space DOS 2.0 or higher EGA/VGA	386DX/33 MHz 4 MB RAM Mouse

If you set out to design a bridge simulation that would make you want to quit the game forever, *Positronic Bridge* would be it. It literally does everything wrong, from major details such as no take-back feature to the minor inconvenience of not being able to choose the card backs you want.

Positronic Bridge bills itself as "the only bridge game that learns as you play." The idea is that the computer is always a challenging partner because it bases its skill level on yours — it's only as good as you are. The game also boasts that your computer opponent doesn't "look" before making its decisions. After watching East-West bid and lead the first few times, you'd think that it didn't even look at its *own* hand.



poor graphics, there's no way of throwing out a hand you just don't want to play — even if you don't have a point in your hand, you're forced to sit through the bidding process before you can request a redeal. You also can't take back any bid you've made or card you've played in error, and this is an

There are a lot of bridge games on the market, but this may be the first one in which your opponent leads *your* trumps at the start of the game. Game play is slow even on a 386DX/25 MHz, and the computer seems to be running a

In addition, *Positronic Bridge* is no-frills bridge taken to the extreme. On top of the

especially annoying flaw.

In short, it's probably easier — and a whole lot more satisfying — to call up three friends and get them to come over than it is to play even one hand of *Positronic Bridge*.

— Leslie Mizell

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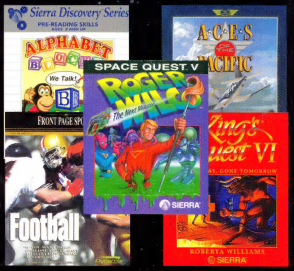

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